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goal! Weekly

Season 4: Issue 3 Monday 25th February 2008

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FOOTBALL FOCUS ON HEIDELBERG'S JOSIP KOZIC

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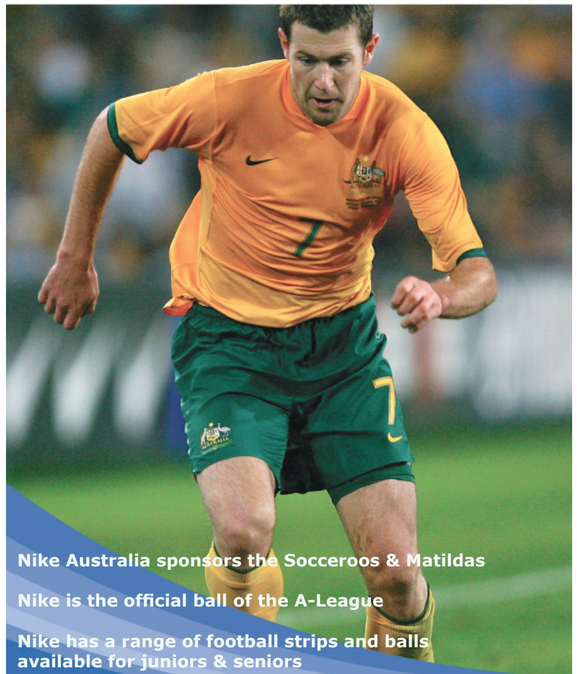

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CENTAL COAST MARINERS

0 - 1

NEWCASTLE JETS

BRIDGE NETS JETS TITLE

Newcastle crowned Australian Champions

Mark Bridge Central Coast defender Tony Vidmar's farewell match has ended in a nightmare after the former Soccercoo's horror mistake gifted Newcastle the winning goal in a dramatic 2007/8 Hyundai A-League grand final at the SFS.

The Jets took out the decider 1-0 in front of 36,354 fans after Mark Bridge, capitalising on an uncharacteristic error from the experienced Vidmar, drilled home the only goal of the match in the 64th minute.

The game ended in highly controversial circumstances after the Mariners were denied a penalty in the dying stages after James Holland appeared to flick the ball away with his elbow inside the six-yard box following a corner.

Central Coast goalkeeper Danny Vukovic, who had raced upfield to await the corner, was sent off by referee Mark Shield after protesting the non-decision.

The no-penalty call and Vidmar's gaffe will dominate post-match talk.

Vidmar tried to turn and look back towards his goalkeeper but got himself badly tangled and was dispossessed by Bridge.

He lunged at Bridge but it was too late, the Jets striker finding only open space and an advancing Alex Wilkinson between him and the Central Coast goal.

After seeing off the Wilkinson threat, Bridge let fly with an unstoppable shot from just outside the box which smacked into the top right-hand corner, leaving an airborne Vukovic no hope at all.

Vidmar was replaced in the 75th minute and will be forever haunted by his mistake.

It always appeared likely a slip-up would bring about a goal, so tight was the contest between two evenly matched sides.

It is Newcastle's first national football title but for the Mariners it's a second grand final loss in three years.

The first half produced plenty in the way of spite but very little goal-mouth action, both sides playing cautiously in a typically tight grand final.

The match erupted in the 11th minute when Joel Griffiths went in for a knee-high challenge on Mile Jedinak.

It led to an ugly scuffle involving almost every player on the field.

Griffiths was awarded a yellow card and was the victim of an even-up two minutes later when Jedinak was booked for bringing the Jets striker down.

It took 14 minutes for the first shot on goal - albeit a weak one - after Griffiths threaded a nice ball for Tarek Elrich.

Matt Thompson posed a greater threat when he latched on to a low cross from Adam D'Apuzzo in the 17th minute, only to see his flick sail just over the bar.

It was all the Jets at this stage, Mark Bridge driving a shot just wide of the target after a lovely lay-off from Jin-Hyung Song.

It took the nervous Mariners half an hour to launch a raid on the Newcastle goal.

Adam Kwasnik, gliding down the left flank, dummied to cross and rounded Song before dragging his near post shot into the side netting.

That half-chance appeared to snap Central Coast out of its lethargy, with a well-struck Greg Owens effort from outside the area blocked and cleared on the penalty spot.

Another member of the Griffiths clan - Jets defender Adam - entered the referee's book in the 38th minute after taking John Hutchinson's legs from under him.

The second half followed a similar pattern to the first - plenty of endeavour but a lack of cohesion or decent ball-to-feet passing.

Bridge's goal and a raft of replacements opened the game up as the chances started to fall both ways.

An irate John Aloisi was denied a penalty in the 86th minute when Adam D'Apuzzo appeared to tug at the former Australian striker's shirt as he lunged at a cross.

But the referee was having nothing of it and found himself in hotter water minutes later when he turned down another penalty claim following Holland's handball.

Central Coast Mariners	*0*
Newcastle Jets	*1*
(Mark Bridge 64')	

Sydney Football Stadium, Sydney
Referee: Mark Shield
Assistant Referees: Nathan Gibson & Ben Wilson
Fourth Official: Matthew Breeze
Crowd: 36,354

Joe Marston Medal Winner: Andrew Durante (Newcastle Jets)

Central Coast Mariners: 20.Danny VUKOVIC (gk), 7.John HUTCHINSON, 12.Greg OWENS (6.Andre GUMPRECHT 69'), 13.Tony VIDMAR (2.Matt SIMON 76'), 16.Nigel BOOGAARD, 18.Alex WILKINSON (Captain), 19.Adam KWASNIK (10.Tom PONDELJAK 69'), 22.Sasho PETROVSKI, 23.Mile JEDINAK, 25.John ALOISI, 26.Alvin CECCOLI.

Yellow Cards: Mile Jedinak 12', Nigel Boogaard 90', John Aloisi 90+3'.
Red Cards: Danny Vukovic 90+3'

Newcastle Jets: 1.Ante COVIC (gk), 2.Adam GRIFFITHS, 3.Jade NORTH (Captain), 5.Stuart MUSIALIK, 6.Andrew DURANTE, 8.Matt THOMPSON (23.Jason HOFFMAN 76'), 9.Joel GRIFFITHS, 11.Tarek ELRICH, 13.Adam D'APUZZO, 19.Mark BRIDGE (25. James HOLLAND 73'), 28.Jin-Hyung SONG (10.Denni 90+2')

Yellow Cards: Joel Griffiths 11', Adam Griffiths 37'.
Red Cards: Nil

Words by FFA
Photo by Therese Duffy

How sweet it is! Newcastle United Jets skipper Jade North holds aloft the coveted 2008 A-League Championship trophy after disposing of the Central Coast Mariners in the Grand Final.

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By Craig MacKenzie

GO FOR IT, TONY!

FFV to go statewide

In what could be the most exciting development for the sport in Victoria for decades, FFV Head of Football Operations, Tony Persoglia, is off to regional Victoria this week to hopefully sign off on deals that could see the Foxtel Cup caravan taking the elite level of the sport to many corners of the state.

Persoglia and FFV have an ambitious plan that would see Premier League games against the AIS this season taking place in regional centres with the local associations, councils and local media all involved.

In one of the mooted centres, Shepparton, the local media already is cock-a-hoop about the prospect of hosting clashes between the AIS squad, which showcases some of the finest young talent in Australia, and an elite Premier League outfit.

Throw in Ballarat, Bendigo, Morwell and Albury–Wodonga and the potential to use the Foxtel Cup as a superb marketing tool for the game's development becomes apparent.

Taking the show on the road: Historic Ballarat could well be among a number of regional Victorian cities to play a key role in broadening the appeal of the Foxtel Cup.

Now we know what was meant by a 3 January posting on the FFV website this year which addressed the issue of fixturing, principally the anomaly of having the AIS squad fly down here for every game throughout the season. That's what took place last year at a cost, to the AIS, of around $250,000.

The website article quoted Persoglia as saying: "We are working on some exciting fixture initiatives for 2008 including some games in Canberra, several in rural Victoria and a small quantity (of AIS games) in Melbourne …"

Persoglia also is hopeful of tying up deals for double headers whereby the Premier League clash would be preceded by a State League clash. The Ballarat Red Devils in Division Two North-West and Third Division South-East outfit Morwell Pegasus are obvious candidates.

If Persoglia succeeds, then having the local side on show as a prelude to the main event would add another dimension to the local interest.

The statewide push also will impact upon the VIS squad which doubles as the AIS reserves and competes in the Foxtel Cup Under-21 competition. While the youngsters will play the bulk of their games at the sport's Darebin headquarters, Persoglia hopes to see some of their fixtures moved to country centres and says that VIS coach Ian Greener is delighted at the prospect.

There's also a cost-cutting motive behind the initiative as it became clear by the end of last season that the AIS was struggling to underwrite its travel and accommodation expenses.

While the fixture initiatives could prove a great fillip for the sport, they will come too late for some sides. Frankston Pines, one of the least cashed-up teams in the competition, had to fly to Canberra last Saturday morning, play the AIS, stay overnight in motel accommodation then fly back to Melbourne on Sunday morning.

Pines received $5000 from the AIS (through FFV) to offset their costs but still expected to be close to $3000 out of pocket. "Unfortunately we were not in a position to do anything about this," said Pines coach Adam Jamieson last Friday.

"Another problem we faced is that flights out of Canberra to Melbourne after about 7.30pm on Saturdays are limited.

I haven't verified this but that's what I've been told. "As a coach I'm hopeful that the experience can bring the squad together even more and that's how I'm putting it to the boys."

When queried about the likelihood of many other Foxtel Cup sides avoiding a Canberra trip, Jamieson replied: "We're the guinea pigs, that's for sure. I've heard that Oakleigh and Richmond may be trying to get their games switched to Albury. I'd much prefer a four-hour car trip to Albury than a flight to Canberra on the morning of the game."

Nevertheless, the FFV move is a clear indication that it wants to continue to have the AIS in the Foxtel Cup and FFV CEO Mark Rendell is already on record praising the quality of the Canberra-based youngsters saying "I think the AIS adds great value to the competition."

The groundbreaking fixture initiative is another slap in the face for our NSW counterparts who continue to shun the AIS, albeit that senior AIS coach and former Socceroo, Steve O'Connor, is a former NSW federation employee whose distinguished club career revolved around Sydney-based clubs.

At the end of last season the NSW body had the opportunity of luring the AIS squad to its elite competition. In the end, member club parochialism slammed the door shut. NSW's loss remains our gain.

The FFV are committed to providing a sound platform in order to assist with the development of the AIS talent pool.

goal! Weekly

This week's line-up

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FOXTEL CUP STANDINGS

	P	W	D	L	F	A	PT
Richmond	2	2	0	0	7	1	6
A.I.S	2	2	0	0	8	3	6
Coburg Utd	2	2	0	0	5	1	6
Heidelberg Utd	2	1	1	0	2	1	4
Western Suburbs	2	1	0	1	1	3	3
Melbourne Knights	2	0	2	0	2	2	2
Oakleigh Cannons	2	0	2	0	2	2	2
Altona Magic	2	0	2	0	1	1	2
Frankston Pines	2	0	1	1	4	5	1
Fawkner Blues	2	0	1	1	1	2	1
Green Gully Cavaliers	2	0	1	1	0	2	1
Preston Lions	2	0	1	1	2	6	1
Whittlesea Zebras	2	0	1	1	2	6	1
South Melbourne	2	0	0	2	2	4	0

RESULTS

Richmond Eagles	2 - 0	Green Gully Cavaliers
AIS	3 - 2	Frankston Pines
Oakleigh Cannons	0 - 0	Heidelberg United
South Melbourne	1 - 2	Coburg United
Western Suburbs	1 - 0	Fawkner Blues
Melbourne Knights	1 - 1	Altona Magic
Preston Lions	1 - 1	Whittlesea Zebras

UNDER 21 DETAILS

Richmond 1 Green Gully Cavaliers 0, Oakleigh Cannons 4 Heidelberg Utd 1, V.I.S 0 Frankston Pines 0, Melbourne Knights 1 Altona Magic 0, South Melbourne 1 Coburg Utd 2, Western Suburbs 1 Fawkner Blues 1, Preston Lions 2 Whittlesea Zebras 3

	P	W	D	L	F	A	PT
Richmond	2	2	0	0	4	1	6
Oakleigh Cannons	2	1	1	0	5	2	4
Western Suburbs	2	1	1	0	3	1	4
Whittlesea Zebras	2	1	1	0	3	2	4
Melbourne Knights	2	1	1	0	1	0	4
Green Gully Cavaliers	2	1	0	1	3	1	3
Coburg Utd	2	1	0	1	2	3	3
Fawkner Blues	2	0	2	0	1	1	2
Frankston Pines	2	0	2	0	1	1	2
V.I.S	2	0	2	0	0	0	2
South Melbourne	2	0	1	1	4	5	1
Heidelberg Utd	2	0	1	1	4	7	1
Preston Lions	2	0	0	2	3	6	0
Altona Magic	2	0	0	2	0	4	0

THE TOP MARKSMEN

Player, Club	Goals
Naidovski, Jason A.I.S	4
Cardozo, Pablo Richmond SC	3
Danning, Kofi A.I.S	3
Josifovski, Alexander Coburg United FC	3
Cardozo, Richard Richmond SC	2
Catalano, Michael Richmond SC	2

ROUND TWO FIXTURES

RICHMOND EAGLES
v
MELBOURNE KNIGHTS
Kevin Bartlett Reserve
Fri 29 Feb KO 8:15PM

FRANKSTON PINES
v
PRESTON LIONS
Monterey Reserve
Sat 1 Mar KO 6:00PM

COBURG UTD
v
OAKLEIGH CANNONS
Knights Stadium
Sat 1 Mar KO 6:00PM

HEIDELBERG UTD
v
A.I.S
Olympic Village
Sun 2 Mar KO 5:00PM

FAWKNER BLUES
v
ALTONA MAGIC
CB Smith Reserve
Sun 2 Mar KO 6:00PM

SOUTH MELBOURNE
v
WESTERN SUBURBS
Bob Jane Stadium
Sun 2 Mar KO 6:00PM

WHITTLESEA ZEBRAS
v
GREEN GULLY
Epping Soccer Stadium
3 Mar KO 8:15PM

Please check the FFV website for any amendments

RICHMOND EAGLES

2 - 0

GREEN GULLY CAVALIERS

EAGLES CONTINUE TO FLY HIGH

Cardozo brace disposes Cavaliers

Suprise league leaders after the first round, Richmond hosted Green Gully on a cold and windy Friday night at Kevin Bartlett Reserve.

The Eagles began the game defending the Heyington Bridge End, aided in their cause by a strong westerly wind. Having received his international clearance during the week, Richie Cardozo was brought into the starting line up for Richmond to face his former club, in place of Nick Kalambokis. Zoran Cvetkovski also came into the side for Simon Webster. The Cavaliers fielded the same starting eleven that drew away at Altona Magic in the opening round of the season.

Five minutes into the game John Adam spurned a glorious opportunity to put the away side in front. Steve Burton's cross from the left went through two pairs of players at the front post and fell to an unmarked Delev at the back, but he shot across the face of goal from ten yards out. Jesse Krncevic shot wide for the home side eight minutes later, after the ball was laid of to him at the top of the penalty area by Richie Cardozo. Delev headed wide shortly after, when the ball was headed around the penalty area several times following a corner. By now the game was being played in steadily increasing rain.

A foul by Jeff Fleming on Richie Cardozo on the half-way line in the eighteenth minute saw referee Perry Mur pull out the first yellow card of the game. Stuart Webster made a good save from a twenty-five yard Matthew Sanders strike as the teams fought for the early supremacy.

It was the home side who was to gain the upper hand in the twenty-eighth minute. Semir Sivic put in a great ball from the right wing which Richie Cardozo met at the near post with a well-timed run to sweep the ball past Steven Tilovski in the Gully goal.

The same combination should have given Richmond a second goal seven minutes later. Another ball from Sivic found the younger Cardozo at the far post, but this time the finish was a let-down for the home support. Stuart McCluskey picked up a late booking, but Richmond were largely untroubled in maintaining their advantage into the break.

Ian Dobson rang in the changes at the break, Andy Vargas and Joel Nikolic entering the fray as Gully looked to get on the attack. It was Richmond who carved out the first chance though, when McCluskey's free kick led to Krncevic having a header cleared. Just a minute later a flick on from Krncevic sent Richie Cardozo away on the right side of the penalty area, and he broke into the box before slipping the ball past Tilovski with the outside of his left boot to double the lead for the Eagles.

Richmond went close again shortly after, Richie Cardozo standing on the ball before releasing Sivic who sent in a great ball to the near post which saw a header from Krncevic cleared to safety. A very early last roll of the dice saw Green Gully make their final substitution in just the fifty-seventh minute, Aziz Behich coming on for Dragi Nastevski who appeared to be walking a red-card tightrope.

On the hour mark Richie Cardozo slammed the ball over the bar from eight yards as he sought to emulate his brother Pablo's hat-trick on debut the previous week. Seven minutes later the pacy Behich shot over the goal after a Manny Muscat cross was flicked on to him in space at the far post. Richmond weathered a good spell from Gully and were back on the attack when Krncevic shot over the bar after a lay off from Dimi Tsiaras. The dangerous Richie Cardozo was brought down by John Adam with fifteen minutes remaining, as Mur issued his fourth booking of the game.

Richmond had penalty shout denied a minute later, when a free kick spilled in the box and appeared to strike the arm of Burton as he cleared the ball away. Substitute Nick Kalambokis broke free for them on the left and chipped over Tilovski from an angle, the ball bouncing off the crossbar to Krncevic, who also appealed for a penalty as his shot was blocked on the line. Sivic had a shot from distance well saved by Tilovski.

As the rain continued to drive down, another substitute for Richmond, Shane Rexhepi, drew another penalty appeal when his shot from ten yards out in the middle of the goal also seemed to strike an arm as it was prevented from crossing the line.

A solid contest given the dismal conditions came to an end with Richmond holding their 2-0 advantage, keeping up their 100% winning start to the season. Green Gully occupy an unusually lowly place on the table in the early stages of the 2008 campaign with just the one point after two appearances.

Richmond: St.Webster, A.Lines, S.McClusey, D.Tsiaras, J.Krncevic, S.Sivic, M.Catalano (Si.Webster 70'), R.Cardozo, P.Cardozo (N.Kalambokis 75'), A.Kovacic, Z.Cvetkovski (S.Rexhepi 80').

Goals: R.Cardozo 28' 52'

Yellow Cards: McCluskey 38' Sivic 76'
Red cards: None

Green Gully: S.Tilovski, K.Ivesic (J.Nikolic 46'), S.Burton, D.Fak, J.Fleming, Koce Delev, J.Adam, M.Sanders (A.Vargas 46'), E.Muscat, R.Ollerton, D.Nastevski (A.Behich 57').

Goals: None

Yellow Cards: Fleming 18' Nastevski 50' Adam 75' Burton 81'
Red cards: None

Man of the Match:
Semir Sivic (Richmond Eagles)

Venue: Kevin Bartlett Reserve
Crowd: 300

By Mark Boric

Photos by Mark Boric

Players of Richmond and Green Gully take to the field with Junior Catalano and Zoran Cvetkovski most prominent in the picture.

Two goal hero Richie Cardozo of the Richmond Eagles.

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3 - 2

FRANKSTON PINES

AIS LEAVE PINES STRANDED

Naidovski double secures points

The AIS notched a second win of the new season from its opening two Foxtel Cup encounters when it defeated Frankston Pines by 3-2 in Canberra on Saturday.

The AIS opened the scoring in the 31st minute when a horrible defensive mix-up by the Pines defence handed youngster, Kofi Danning, a golden opportunity to break the deadlock. Two Pines defenders ran into eachother leaving Danning free to pick up the loose ball and slot a shot past a helpless Brad Zealley in goal.

Undeterred the Pines pushed for an equaliser and moments later Frankston's Nick Waite unleashed a superb shot that brought the best out of AIS 'keeper Mark Birighitti. Waite's piledriver seemed destined for goal, but a fingertip save by Birighitti pushed the ball onto the crossbar. According to some spectators at the ground the save is already a candidate for one of the best of the season.

In the 41st minute the travelling Pines got its just rewards when last season's top scorer, Easal Masi, opened his account in his new colours.

In a move that paid dividends, the ball went down the left hand flank and whipped into the penalty box. Cameron Jones was in a good position to meet the ball and knocked it over to Masi who made no mistake from the back post to head home. In a fairly even first-half where both teams showed patches of dominance the scores were locked at 1-1 as the referee blew for the break.

As the second period commenced the AIS managed to get the upper hand and dictated play for most of the second stanza playing faultless possession football. This culminated in the AIS once again getting their noses in front in the 53rd minute when Jason Naidovski completed an impressive move. Naidlovski made the most of an opening and let fly with a stinging shot that took a deflection and found its way into the back of the net.

Pines coach Adam Jamieson then decided the time was right to make some changes and brought on substitute Adam Fadljevic for Boris Ovcin. Within minutes of coming on Fadljevic repaid some of his coach's faith by equalising for the Pines for the second time in the afternoon. A free-kick was awarded about 25 yards from the goals and Fadljevic hit the ball sweetly round the wall and into the top corner of the net.

From there, Pines took the initiative and the game right up to the AIS. Just when it seemed the Pines were imching closer to avoiding its second 2-2 result of the season, against the run of play Zealley attempted to clear the ball from his area and supposedly hit the hand of Trent Malcolm during mid flight. In what seemd a harsh decision ,referee Kevin Docherty pointed to the spot and awarded the AIS a penalty. Amid protests from Pines up stepped Naidovski to grab his second of the afternoon making no mistake from the spot.

In the last 15 minutes off the match the Pines could consider itself unlucky not to have clinched a deserved point, but not for three attempts to be desperately cleared off the AIS goal-line. However, Docherty blew for full-time and the AIS's winning start to the season was still intact.

Speaking after the 3-2 loss, Pines coach Adam Jamieson was forthcoming with his comments in regards to the exercise of playing an away Foxtel Cup match in Canberra.

"I thought the organisation was an absolute disgrace. We got off the plane and there was no bus to take us to the hotel or the venue. We actually got dropped off at the front of the ground by our supporters who had driven up to Canberra. We ended up having to make at least six trips back and forth and couldn't find anyone to give us directions. There wasn't an official in sight to greet us when we arrived at the airport and after the match finished, the AIS left the ground almost immediately and once again we were stranded. We had to rely on our supporters yet again to ferry us to and from the ground and our hotel."

On the flip side Jamieson did add that the exercise was useful in building team spirit and bonding within the squad, but as mentioned earlier, was less than impressed with the execution of implementing the logistics of the venture.

Line ups:

AIS:
M.Birighitti, S.Munro, D.Milovanovic, D.Mullen, I.Pavlak, R.Greer, P.Cvetanovski, H.Fondyke (R.Close 56'), J.Naidovski, K.Danning (L.Braude 32'), A.Tabor (M.Theodore 65').

Goals: Danning 31', Naidovski 53'/73'.

Yellow cards: Munro 3'.
Red cards: None.

Frankston Pines:
B.Zealley, L.Trebbia, M.Trent, R.Duckworth, C.Smart, C.Jones (A.skedlar 62'), C.Leopold, C.Metcalfe, B.Ovcin (A.Fadljevic 65'), E.Masi, N.Waite (D.Miller 70').

Goals: Masi 41', Fadljevic 67'.

Yellow cards: Waite 30', Duckworth 57', Trebbia 87', Metbalfe 90'.
Red cards: None.

Venue: AIS, Canberra
Crowd: 100

By James Taylor

In Canberra

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OAKLEIGH CANNONS

0 - 0

HEIDELBERG UNITED

STALEMATE AT JACK EDWARDS

Munro's Cannons draw again

Oakleigh Cannons continued their low key start to the season with a second consecutive draw, a nil all scoreline against Heidelberg United at Jack Edwards reserve on Friday night.

In cool, wet conditions, watched by a healthy crowd which huddled together under the new stand, both clubs resumed hostilities after their recent battle in the pre-season Hellenic Cup just a fortnight ago.

The Bergers came out full of confidence, determined to add the Cannons' scalp to that of arch rival South Melbourne, from the previous week.

The visitors dominated both possession and scoring opportunities in the first half. The midfield exploited a numerical advantage, with Jim Drossos aiming dangerous crosses at the heart of the Cannons' defense. Teammate Eric Vassiliadis was also causing problems for the Cannons with his willingness to take on defenders and his ability to find space.

Heidelberg's best chance of the half fell to Vassiliadis after the powerful striker Mark Tsiorlas released him with a neat pass in behind a square Cannons' back four. Fortunately for the Cannons, keeper Adrian Cagalj was quick off his line and parried Vassiliadis's shot to safety.

Playing with the breeze at their backs, the visitors continued to outplay the home team and test the Cannons keeper who was by far the busiest keeper on the park.

The inactivity of the Oakleigh attack in the first half reduced Bergers' keeper Marco Sutalo to the role of mere spectator in the first half. That was to change dramatically after half time when it was the Cannons' turn to lay siege to the United defence. And it was the Cannons' youth brigade that led the charge. Firstly, striker Tex Apostolikas sprung into action threatening to add to his debut goal last week against the Pines. Trent Waterson also looked dangerous out wide for the home team when he replaced Stuart Kelly at half time.

Cannons coach Stuart Munro had the luxury of freshening up his attack by introducing Milos Lujic and Iho Khrapko, both of who went close to scoring the opening goal.

At the other end, Heidelberg went close to snatching a winner when firstly skipper Tony Ouliaris and then Drossos fired shots in quick succession. But once again, Cannons' keeper Cagalj proved impassable.

After the final whistle, Cannons coach Munro commented that the result was a fair one and that he felt confident that his team would continue to improve. " I just feel that every week that goes past, we'll get stronger. You know, I'm looking forward to this team in two -three weeks because I think we'll do quite well. There's Trent (Waterson), there's young Igor. These guys joined us quite late and haven't done a long preseason. That's why they are probably 2-3 weeks away. Even Billy (Damianos) is 3-4 weeks away from where he wants to be fitness wise. They're important players. That's why I'm saying in 3-4 weeks we'll be a far stronger team because those guys will be much harder and fitter and we'll start to see the real ability that they've got."

Heildelberg coach George Katsakis said after the match, " It's always good to come to Oakleigh which is a difficult venue, and take a point away. They're probably feeling it a little bit more."

He was full of praise for his team's first half performance. " The first half was exceptional. It was some of the best football I've seen played in a long time. I think in the second half it turned against us. The positive is that we didn't concede a goal away from home which is a bonus."

Next week the Cannons are back on the road away to newcomers Coburg United, whilst the Bergers host the A.I.S.

Lines up:
Cannons: Cagalj, Ewin, Munoz, Rosmam, Drakos, S., Apostolikas (Khrapko, 77'), Nilo (Lujic, 61') Kelly (Waterson 45'), Lagana, Damianos, Drakos, A.

Goals: None
Yellow cards: Lagana 69', A.drakos 61', Apostolikas 81'.
Red cards: None

Heidelberg: Sutalo, Roberts, Liparotti(Stefanou 12'), Jones, Vassiliadis (Ameti 87'), Kozic, Drossos, Tsiorlas, Dolevski (Alilavic 62'), Ouliaris, Hockless.

Goals: None

Yellow cards: Drossos 50', Ouliaris 65'.
Red cards: None

Men of the match:
Adrian Cagalj (Oakleigh Cannons)
Jim Drossos (Heidelberg United)

Venue: jack edwards Reserve
Crowd: 1500

By George Stogiannou

Photos by Joseph Sirucka

Through the wind and the rain: Heidelberg's Daniel Jones gets his head on the ball as Oakleigh's Stelios Drakos (No 6) looks on from the foreground.

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SOUTH MELBOURNE

1 - 2

COBURG UNITED

COBURG ROCKS SOUTH

Foxtel new boys hold no fear

After the perfect debut in the Victorian Premier League for Coburg United defeating Western Suburbs in round one, Coburg United were pitted against one of the big boys of Victorian Football in what would be an early test for the Joe Montemurro coached team which had made some very significant recruitments over the pre-season and that had yet to be tested against quality opposition.

South Melbourne who had also made significant changes to their squad were keen to get on the points board for 2008 after losing their opening round fixture against arch rivals Heidelberg after having an early lead in the match before being over run by the Bergers.

Both teams named un-changed squads from the opening round and with Bob Jane stadium bathed in sunshine the match began.

The opening twenty-minutes was fairly scrappy which failed to produce any serious attacking moves at either end of the ground. Coburg's defence played fairly deep which allowed South to push up to the half way line which kept the Coburg defence under pressure. Poutakidis playing in a central defensive role was busy launching moves into the front third, while Yousef Yousef who had the upper hand on his opponent Peter Tichy, who found himself in good positions on a couple of occasions in behind the Coburg defence but failed to produce a shot on goal.

The best chance of the half came from a Natsioulas free kick which fell for Diaco eight yards out who could only sky the ball over the crossbar at the thirty-fifth minute mark. South continued to pepper the Coburg goals but bad communication between strikers saw those moves break down embarrassingly at times.

Coburg were unable to muster up an attack of any threatening nature, Vlahos was forced to run wide and hard for balls away from goals and last weeks hat trick hero Alex Josifovski was rarely sighted near the ball.

Within three minutes of the restart South were on the attack again and unlucky not to open the scoring after a nicely floated ball to the front of goals was headed over and out of play.

On fifty-one minutes disaster struck for South from a terrible mix up in the last line of defence. Steven O'Dor was in front of Vlahos as the ball bounced towards Anastasiadis, and only needed O'Dor to head the ball to his keeper which he failed to do allowing Vlahos an opportunity from which he opened the scoring for the visitors.

The pressure was now on the home team as Coburg's defence started to push up the ground and all of a sudden gaps started to appear in South's back line. Coburg had found some confidence in the second half from the goal and it was game on.

On fifty-seven minutes South hit back with a chance from Diaco whose shot on goals clearing the cross bar. On sixty-three minutes Coburg struck again to make it two nil. Anthony Magnacca sent the free kick to the goal mouth where Kovacevic sent the ball to the back of the net with a powerful header. The Coburg fans rose as one to celebrate a fine set up and goal.

Anastasiadis took off a disappointing Yousef Yousef for Armenian at the sixty-fifth minute hoping to spark something in his team as they trailed the game by two goals to nil. On sixty-nine minutes an undisciplined action by Serdar Pir resulted in the defender being shown a red card after a clash with Nathan Caldwell; who was subbed for De Moreas shortly after

The game was becoming very physical as South tried in vain to get into the match and a ten man Coburg where hanging on for dear life lead by Vlahos and Magnacca as South pushed players forward with every attacking move. On eighty-two minutes De Moraes pulled one back for the home team on the third attempt after Hrehoresin kept denying South from a goal mouth scramble; giving home supporters something to cheer about and hope of rescuing a point.

In the end South were unable to find the equaliser thanks to some grim defending by Coburg, and the fairytale continues for Coburg as they remain undefeated.

Coburg United's Andy Vlahos steers the ball past goalkeeper Dean Anastasiadis of South Melbourrne and opens the scoring at Bob Jane Stadium.

LINE-UPS:

South Melbourne: D.Anastasiadis, S.Nunes, A.Von Dommele, S. O'Dor, F.De Moraes, V.Natsioulas, R.Diaco(Hamlet Armenian 65'), G.Zoric, R.Tavsancioglu, Y. Yusef (G.De Nittis 65'), S.Poutakidis.

Goals: De Moraes 82'.

COBURG:

A.Hrehoresin, P.Tichy, S.Pir, F.Richards (D.Rocco 85'), A.Josifovski (E.Garcia 78'), A.Vlahos, R.Thompson, A.Magnacca, B.Gilmour, S.Kovacevic, M. Mustafa.

Goals: Vlahos 51', Kovacevic 57'.

MAN OF THE MATCH:
ANDY VLAHOS.

By John Attard

Photos by John Attard

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WESTERN SUBURBS

1 - 0

FAWKNER BLUES

SUBURBS OPEN UP '08 ACCOUNT

Kindtner knicks it at the death

In a game that saw both teams play a scrappy affair Western Suburbs won in the last minutes of the game. Suburbs can thank Fawkner keeper Patsi Schwalger who up to the 85th minute had made some good saves however one blunder decided the game.

This game was heading for a 0-0 result which would have been a fair demonstration of both team's performances.

On the 11 minute Patsi Schwalger makes a finger tip save from a suburbs attack forcing the ball to a corner.

Gallanos was busy early for Fawkner and Hatzimouratis looked dangerous for suburbs , with a shot which collected the post on the 33 minute

Youssef and Ismail where looking dangerous up forward for Fawkner with explosive runs giving Suburbs a few headaches in the backline.

In the 40th minute Ismail had a one on one opportunity with the keeper to give Fawkner the lead but Bosnjak did very well to get his finger tips to the ball and put it around the post.

The opening of the second half we saw Suburbs on the attack testing the Fawkner backline which stood tall all day .In particular Juric, Bosevski and Napoli a solid as a rock. Hatzimouratis was switched form the right side to the left side of Suburbs attacking 3 when Napoli started to get well on top of him. He was to be dangerous again for suburbs as he provided some pace and attack up forward.

The experience of the suburbs midfield led by Kidtner was proven to be the key in suburbs victory.

The goal come 5 minutes from the end when the game was looking like a nil all draw from a Kidtner's shot which went through the legs of the Fawkner keeper which should have been a regulation save.

By Nino Napoli

Photos by Daniel Flis

Referee Damir Basic attempts to regain some order as tempers flare between Western Suburbs and Fawkner Blues at Ralph Reserve yesterday.
In the background Suburbs goalkeeper Marijo Bosnjak wonders what hit him.

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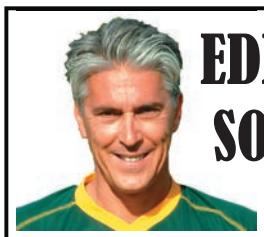

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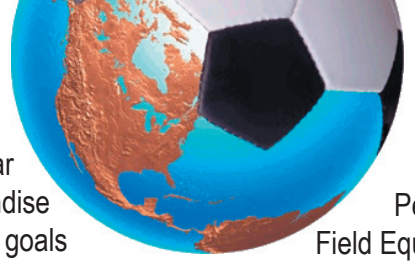

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JOSIP KOZIC

HEIDELBERG WARRIORS FC

FULL NAME: Josip Kozic
BIRTHPLACE: Bosnia / Herzegovina
BIRTH DATE: 03/06/1978
HEIGHT: 178 cm
WEIGHT: 82 kg
MARRIED: Girlfriend
CAR: Toyota
OCCUPATION OUTSIDE OF FOOTBALL: Painter Picasso
NICKNAME: Koza
PREVIOUS CLUBS: Quite a few
REPRESENTATIVE HONOURS: Bosnia / Herzegovina U-18, Vic State Team
CHILDHOOD FOOTBALL HERO: Alan Boksic
FAVOURITE O/S PLAYER: Pavel Nedved
FAVOURITE V-LEAGUE PLAYER: Eric Vassiliadis
FAVOURITE FORMER SOCCEROO: Paul Okon
FAVOURITE CURRENT SOCCEROO: Tim Cahill
MOST MEMORABLE MATCH AS A PLAYER: Too many to decide
MOST MEMORABLE MATCH AS A FAN: Hajduk v Dinamo
MOST MEMORABLE GOAL YOU'VE SCORED: Melbourne Knights v Olyrooos 2000
FUNNIEST MOMENT IN FOOTBALL: Taking corner last year at Epping stadium against Preston (ask boys from Whittlesea team 2007)
BIGGEST DISAPPOINTMENT: Coming back from Europe to Australia to play football
WORST INJURY: Fractured ankle
MOST DIFFICULT OPPONENT: Jeff Fleming (Green Gully)
FAVOURITE AWAY GROUND: Epping stadium
SUPERSTITIONS: Walking last from the changing room before the game and at the half time
TYPICAL MATCH DAY MEAL: Nandos
WHAT ARE YOUR STRENGTHS: Im very good in the air, using both feet, tackling, distribution, shooting in other words I'm just the best!
WHAT ARE YOUR WEAKNESSES: Not scoring enough goals
FAVOURITE TEAM WHEN GROWING UP: Hajduk Split
FAVOURITE OTHER SPORTS: Handball, basketball, tennis…..
FAVOURITE OTHER SPORTSPERSON: Goran Ivanisevic
FAVOURITE FOODS: Seafood
FAVOURITE ACTOR/ACTRESS: Halle Berry
HOBBIES: Casino – Black Jack
FAVOURITE HOLIDAY RESORT: Anywhere in Croatia
FAVOURITE NIGHTSPOT: Aurora – Primosten,Croatia
IDEAL DATE: Food, drinks and more drinks and some action
FAVOURITE TV SHOWS: Samantha who
FAVOURITE MUSIC: Cro music - Thompson
FAVOURITE FILM: Not a big fan
LAST SOCCER SHIRT YOU BOUGHT: Croatian national strip
FUNNIEST RUMOUR YOU'VE HEARD ABOUT YOURSELF: Going for trials with Bayern Munich
BIGGEST INFLUENCE ON CAREER: My dad and brother
BIGGEST DRAG IN SOCCER: Losing
FOOTBALL AMBITION: Win the Championship with Heidelberg this year
WHICH PERSON IN THE WORLD WOULD YOU MOST LIKE TO MEET? : Bart Simpson
YOUR TIP FOR THIS YEAR'S FOXTEL CUP: How can u even ask me that question. Heidelberg Warriors all the way. Opa….Opa!

Photo by John Punshon

Clifford Tuck

HAS FAWKNER STRUCK GOLD?

Vanis tempts Tuck for a 'final' fling

Four weeks before the start of the 2008 Foxtel Cup, retired central defender Clifford Tuck and his wife were chatting at home at 10.30pm when the phone rang. It was Vlado Vanis. His first question was typically blunt.

"Are you fit enough?" asked Vanis. Tuck knew that his former coach at First Division outfit Bentleigh Greens was in charge of Fawkner and he knew that Vanis was throwing a tempting proposition in his direction.

"I told Vlado that I had only a week of pre-season work behind me and that I wasn't fit enough to play at Premier League level," said Tuck.

"Vlado said okay and said he'd give me a 20-day program to follow. He said he wanted more experience in the side and four weeks later I found myself playing against Melbourne Knights in Round One." Tuck's 20-day program involved separate sessions mixed with senior squad training. Throughout that period he had just one day off and the fast-track fitness regime paid off against Knights when he turned in a competitive performance against former Socceroo Joe Spiteri, and Zoran Petrevski, recently returned to Victoria from the A-League's Queensland Roar.

"As arrogant as I am I still wasn't sure if I was up to playing at Premier League level," said Tuck. "I was really switched on before the game and I think I competed well but it was very challenging. I think you have more time (than First Division) to think about what you're doing but I also think that you have to concentrate harder. If you give someone like Spiteri half a chance you know that he'll probably finish it."

The Mount Isa-born Tuck has an impressive football résumé, which includes a tour of Germany with a Queensland representative squad when he was only 16 and stints in the Queensland Premier League with Brisbane Lions and Brisbane City. The German jaunt took in games against under-18 sides from Bayer Leverkeusen, Cologne, and Borussia Mönchengladbach.

A few years earlier, the Tuck family had moved from Mount Isa to Townsville and Tuck had made his senior debut with PYC Aitkenvale (as a 14-year-old) under the coaching of Tony Buesnell, who went on to coach Fiji's national team.

In 1993 Tuck took up a contract with Brisbane Lions where he was to play for six seasons. At Lions he was coached by Miron Bleiberg and he found the former Queensland Roar supremo a demanding taskmaster.

"I thought Miron was great. He was very challenging, very intelligent and could be very arrogant. It was Miron's way or the highway. But he pushed you really hard and if you could get to where he wanted you to be he'd take it another step further. I've always appreciated that in a coach."

In the 1999 and 2000 seasons Tuck switched to rival Brisbane City where he was coached by Bob Hamilton and former young Socceroo and South Melbourne striker Danny Wright.

Tuck, however, always found himself split between two competing ambitions, indeed, mixing football with academic pursuits has been a juggling act that he has had to confront regularly. He completed a degree in applied sciences before switching to law. It's meant that football has often had to settle for a back seat.

During his second season with Brisbane City he suffered a bad ankle injury but continued playing. At the end of that season he thought that it was time to hang up the boots.

In 2001, career opportunities drew him to Melbourne where he works as a corporate lawyer for Newcrest Mining Ltd, a leader in the exploration, development and operation of gold and copper mines.

"After six months in Melbourne I realised that I didn't know anyone who wasn't a lawyer and that's not the way to go through life. Through a client I was introduced to the Stonnington thirds and found myself playing alongside Alan Davidson and Ang Postecoglou."

Tuck played with Knox City in 2003 before switching to Port Melbourne where he quickly proved himself one of the side's leading performers. Shortly after the start of the 2005 season Andy O'Dell enticed him to Richmond. Port received a $1500 transfer fee but by the time Tuck arrived at Kevin Bartlett Reserve, O'Dell was gone.

"Andy recruited me for Richmond but during the process he quit. Dean Hennessey took over as coach and we had a really good season, winning promotion to Premier League."

At the end of that season Tuck hung up his boots for a second time. A heart-to-heart talk with Hennessey revealed that the coach had doubts about Tuck being up to the mark as a Premier League player. "I'd taken a holiday and missed a fair bit of the pre-season work, but it was worth it because I proposed to my wife on that holiday."

And the big man wasn't out of the game long. His next football lifeline was thrown by Terry Kirkham, then coaching Bentleigh Greens. Kirkham was sacked part of the way through the 2006 season and replaced by Vanis, a playing and coaching legend at Melbourne Croatia.

Tuck took to Vanis's methods and everything seemed to be going fine during the 2007 season with Bentleigh mounting a serious promotion push when suddenly Vanis was sacked after a 5–1 home loss to Langwarrin.

"At the time it was an odd decision. I think we'd won the two games before that and were one point off second spot. But Vlado had heard the rumours a few weeks earlier."

Fawkner's Clifford Tuck will be trying to match his wits with Premier League opposition this year after reuniting with coach Vlado Vanis.

Harry Chalkitis took over and the Greens maintained a promotion push until the third last game of the season when they lost 1–0 to eventual league runner-up Coburg United.

"I don't think we ever recovered emotionally from that loss because we then drew our next game and lost to Southern Stars in the last round."

But it was a great season for Tuck who finished up tying the league's best player award with Langwarrin and former National League star Brian MacNicol. Nevertheless, that peg that those boots kept getting hung up on was in use once more.

"I spoke to Harry about the 2008 season and he outlined to me what he expected in a player and in a captain and that I didn't fit the bill. I thought that it wasn't a bad way to go out with a best and fairest award to my name. Until that phone call from Vlado. Look, it's very difficult. My job doesn't end at 5 but I've got to leave at 5 to get to Fawkner for training.

"I'm not the most gifted player on the planet but this is a great chance to test myself and there's a sense of symmetry really because my career took off in the Premier League in Brisbane and it's nice to be given the chance to finish in the Premier League in Melbourne."

Tuck says that this definitely will be his last season in the game. Definitely. If so it will be the fourth time that he has definitely retired. You can picture the scene, can't you. It's late January 2009. He'll be 33 years old then. He's sitting at home chatting to his wife in front of the TV. It's around 10.30pm when suddenly the phone rings …

By Craig MacKenzie

Photos by Daniel Flis

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MELBOURNE KNIGHTS
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ALTONA MAGIC

PELIKAN BRINGS THE HOUSE DOWN

All square at Somers Street

After both Altona Magic and their hosts the Melbourne Knights drew their opening encounters, it was all to play for in the second round of the Foxtel Cup.

Chris Taylor's Knights outfit had only one change from their opening match against Fawkner, which was the return of Anthony Pelikan to the starting line up in the place of the ineffective Alex Kiratzoglou.

Despite some pre-match fireworks at Knights stadium, the first 15 minutes saw few openings as both sides felt each other out early on.

Henry Fa'arodo used the extremely fast pitch to his advantage in the 20th minute, when he burst through the Knights defence, only to be denied by a brilliant tackle by Matthew Grbesa.

The Knights responded with a sharp turn and shot on the edge of the box by Zoran Petrevski, which was comfortably saved by Peter Zois in the Magic goal.

Cameron Watson again showed his ability to deliver a telling ball when he picked out veteran Joe Spiteri inside the Magic box. Spiteri calmly bought down the ball and volleyed at goal, only to be denied by the feet of Zois.

Watson was again on target when he picked out Anthony Pelikan with a fabulous through ball, but Pelikan was incorrectly ruled offside.

Five minutes before the break, Pelikan made space on the edge of the box but his low shot skewed wide of the goal.

A minute later, a clumsy challenge by Steve Iosifidis on Carl Recchia resulted in a penalty for the Magic. Despite the protest from the Knights players, the decision stood and Michael Curcija placed home his first goal of the new season, making the score one-nil.

Ill discipline saw Savas Ozdemir and Iosifidis booked for dissent, but the Magic's Steve Laurie stupidly pushed Knights skipper Tommy Milardovic off the ball, and was subsequently sent off.

With the man advantage, the Knights began the second half pressing their visitors, and a header by Pelikan from an Ivan Franjic cross was on target, but failed to trouble Zois.

In the 54th minute, a half volley by Franjic had Zois beaten, but the ball crashed into the side netting.

It was a sign of things to come for the Knights, as they pressed for their equaliser, which finally came in the 63rd minute, courtesy of Pelikan. The experienced attacking midfielder took his time initially with the first chance, but his spectacular overhead kick from the rebound bought the house down.

This was the catalyst for a Knights onslaught, which began with a cross by Spiteri to the back post. Arriving on time was Zoran Petrevski at the back post, but the striker's volley hit the side netting.

There was another twist in the tale of this enthralling match when Knights defender Steve Iosifidis was sent off for a stupid handball in the centre of the park, which resulted in his second yellow card of the game.

With both sides now down to ten men, the game was played cautiously for the remainder of the match as both the Knights and the Magic seemed keen to share the spoils.

There were no further chances in the match worth mentioning, which meant that Altona's coach Vlado Tortevski left Knights stadium the happier of the two managers.

Knights Line Up – Savas Ozdemir, Steve Iosifides, Ivan Franjic, Matthew Grbesa, Tommy Milardovic, Cameron Watson (Dario Matkovic 68th), Anthony Pelikan, James Timmons, Craig Elvin, Joe Spiteri (Andrew Barisic 73rd) , Zoran Petrevski

Goals: Pelikan 61'.

Yellow cards: Spiteri 38', Iosifidis 43', Ozdemir 43', watson 44', Milardovic 44'. Red cards: Iosifidis 68'.

Subs not used – Mijo Marinovic, Alex Kiratzoglou, Marko Kuna

Altona Magic – Peter Zois, Stiven Mrkela, Con Anthopoulos, Steve Laurie, Doug Mladenovic, Carl Recchia (Craig Sweeny 78th), Henry Fa'arodo, Agim Sherifovski, Michael Curcija (Pece Cergovski 59th), Todd McSoley, Pece Siveski

Goals: Curcija 40'(pen).

Yellow cards: Mrkela 12', Mladenovic 85', Sweeney 88'. Red cards: Laurie 44'

Subs not used – George Lambadaridis, Chris Rachkovski, Kieren McDowell

Man of the match : Anthony Pelikan (Melbourne Knights)

Venue: Somers Street
Crowd: 3, 000

By Josip Loncaric
Photos by Steve Starek

The Knights celebrate Anthony Pelikan's stunning goal which cancelled Michael Curcija's earlier penalty for the Magic.

PRESTON LIONS
1 - 1
WHITTLESEA ZEBRAS

LATE LIONS GOAL SNATCHES A POINT

Homours shared in grand final replay

Whittlesea Zebras were within a minute of reversing their 2007 grand final loss against Preston, but a 92nd minute John Sapazovski goal robbed them of an avenging win after Jerry Karpeh had given Whittlesea the lead in the 62nd minute.

Though the teams' identities resembled those that contested last year's grand final, in personnel and performance these were two vastly dissimilar sides to those that fought out last season's concluding match.

It took fully 15 minutes before the match shook off the scrappiness that afflicted it, with Preston managing an inkling of continuity as it began to string together passes and maintain possession.

The Lions looked most dangerous down the left with Marinos Gasparis patrolling the touch line, though his crosses into the box failed to cause any true alarm for the Zebras defence.

Despite their proverbial share of possession, Preston created few true chances as their lack of an attacking presence grew increasingly apparent. A double miss-kick inside the box by Nick Lazarevski was the closest they would come to scoring in the first half.

A disjointed first half came to a close with just the solitary shot on target, and the performances of each side promised little in the way of goals for the second period.

However the second half was to prove more fruitful than the first with barely 10 minutes elapsed.

In the 51st Preston's Blaze Georgioski was provided with a path to goal thanks to a Lazarevski through-ball, but a Zebra's 'keeper Kenny Gerochristodoulou was quickly off his line to block Georgioski's shot and defuse the situation.

Whittlesea responded two minutes later with its best chance hitherto when a Steve Martin cross found Sebastian Petrovic in the box, his downward header was brilliantly tipped onto the bar by Lupce Acevski.

There grew a greater intensity in the game as it progressed, and the 62nd minute saw Whittlesea claim an unexpected lead. Nicholas Schwal dallied on the ball in defence before having possession harassed from him by Karpeh who then shot powerfully past a helpless Acevski.

Schwal would replicate his error 15 minutes later and provide Karpeh with the opportunity to double their lead, only this time Karpeh failed to finish. The miss, along with one from James Sherman, would come to haunt Whittlesea.

A long, innocuous ball from Schwal in the 92nd looked destined for the arms of Gerochristodoulou before pitching on the sand-laden surface and sitting up for Sapazovski to side-foot into the net and give his side a share of the points.

The post-match views of both coaches centred largely on the disruption caused by off-season departures.

Lions coach Goran Lozanovski was pessimistic in his predictions for the rest of the season and bemoaned his lack of an attacking presence. "I thought it was a fair result in the end, these two clubs were grand finalists last year will probably be two clubs struggling at the bottom of the table", he said.

"We're lacking a potent striker, give us another three or four weeks and I think we will be a lot more fluent than we were today. The team's more than half changed compared to what it was last year...our preparation has been pretty ordinary compared with last season".

Whittlesea coach Peter Ollerton was equally discouraged by the disturbance caused by his side's off-season player exodus.

"We've lost a hell of a lot of players and we've lost a hell of a lot of players, and it shows. It's very frustrating to coach", Ollerton said. "Two or three that have come in have not kicked a ball for six or seven months, and if you expect them to win straightaway, it's not going to happen."

Preston Lions:
L.Acevski, V.Pititto, L.Anastasiou, F.Catalano (B.Micovski 60'), J.Sapazovski, M.Gasparis (R.Chillico 72'), N.Lazarevski, T.Sterjovski, N.Schwal, I.Kolevski, B.Georgioski.
Yellow cards: Victor Pititto (30), Frank Catalano (40), Nicholas Lazarevski (68)
Red cards: None

Whittlesea Zebras:
K.Gerochristodoulou, S.Martin, R.Anastasiadis, J.Karpeh, S.Petrovic, J.Angelovski, J.Sherman (A.Vulic 72'), A.Colosimo, G.Lombardo, G.Talevski, M.Vazzocchi.

Yellow cards: James Sherman (37), John Angelovski (58), Ross Anastasiadis (81)
Red cards: None

Man of the Match: Tony Sterjovski
Venue: Connor Reserve
Crowd: 600

By Sebastian Kipman
Photos by John Punshon

Preston's John Sapazovski attempts to challenge Whittlesea Zebras' James Sherman in the Foxtel Cup grand final replay played at Connor Reserve yesterday.

OAKLEIGH
1517 Dandenong Road
9569 7099
NUNAWADING
343 Whitehorse Road
9878 8555
THOMASTOWN
Homemaker Centre
9465 9611
RICHMOND
509 Bridge Road
9429 7717
EPPING
3/560 High Street
9408 4911
TAYLORS LAKES
Watergardens
9449 0233
ESSENDON
Homemaker Hub DFO
9351 0669
FOUNTAIN GATE
Fountain Gate Super Centre
8786 5770
MARIBYRNONG
Highpoint Homemaker Centre
9317 7037
adriatic.com.au
ADRIATIC FURNITURE
EXCLUSIVE, YES. EXPENSIVE? NO.

STATE LEAGUE DIVISION ONE
Fixture List 2008

Round 1
Sat 5 Apr 3:00PM **FC Clifton Hill v Bentleigh Greens** Kevin Bartlett Res
Sat 5 Apr 3:00PM **Bulleen Royals v St Albans Saints** Veneto Social Club
Sat 5 Apr 3:00PM **Keilor Park v Springvale White Eagles** Keilor Park Res
Sat 5 Apr 3:00PM **Langwarrin v Southern Stars** Lawton Park Res
Sat 5 Apr 7:00PM **Dandenong Thunder v Sunshine Georgies** George Andrews Res
Sat 5 Apr 7:00PM **Westgate v Kingston City** Ardeer Res

Round 2
Fri 11 Apr 8:30PM **Kingston City v FC Clifton Hill** Grange Res
Sat 12 Apr 3:00PM **Southern Stars v Westgate** Ross Res
Sat 12 Apr 3:00PM **Sunshine Georgies v Bulleen Royals** Chaplin Res
Sun 13 Apr 3:00PM **St Albans Saints v Keilor Park** Churchill Res
Sun 13 Apr 3:00PM **Bentleigh Greens v Dandenong Thunder** Kingston Heath
Sun 13 Apr 6:15PM **Springvale White Eagles v Langwarrin** Serbian Sports

Langwarrin promises to be among the high flyers in '08.

Round 3
Sat 19 Apr 3:00PM Bulleen Royals v Bentleigh Greens Veneto Social Club
Sat 19 Apr 3:00PM Keilor Park v Sunshine Georgies Keilor Park Res
Sat 19 Apr 3:00PM Langwarrin v St Albans Saints Lawton Park Res
Sat 19 Apr 3:00PM Southern Stars v Kingston City Ross Res
Sat 19 Apr 7:00PM Dandenong Thunder v FC Clifton Hill George Andrews Res
Sat 19 Apr 7:00PM Westgate v Springvale White Eagles Ardeer Res

Round 4
Fri 25 Apr 8:30PM Kingston City v Dandenong Thunder Grange Res
Sat 26 Apr 3:00PM Sunshine Georgies v Langwarrin Chaplin Res
Sat 26 Apr 3:00PM Bentleigh Greens v Keilor Park Kingston Heath
Sat 26 Apr 3:00PM FC Clifton Hill v Bulleen Royals Kevin Bartlett Res
Sun 27 Apr 3:00PM St Albans Saints v Westgate Churchill Res
Sun 27 Apr 6:15PM Springvale White Eagles v Southern Stars Serbian Sports

Round 5
Sat 3 May 3:00PM **Bulleen Royals v Dandenong Thunder** Veneto Social Club
Sat 3 May 3:00PM **Keilor Park v FC Clifton Hil**l Keilor Park Res
Sat 3 May 3:00PM **Langwarrin v Bentleigh Greens** Lawton Park Res
Sat 3 May 3:00PM **Southern Stars v St Albans Saints** Ross Res
Sat 3 May 7:00PM **Westgate v Sunshine Georgies** Ardeer Res
Sun 4 May 6:15PM **Springvale White Eagles v Kingston City** Serbian Sports

Round 6
Fri 9 May 8:30PM **Kingston City v Bulleen Royals** Grange Res
Sat 10 May 3:00PM **Sunshine Georgies v Southern Stars** Chaplin Res
Sat 10 May 3:00PM **FC Clifton Hill v Langwarrin** Kevin Bartlett Res
Sat 10 May 7:00PM **Dandenong Thunder v Keilor Park** George Andrews Res
Sun 11 May 3:00PM **St Albans Saints v Springvale White Eagles** Churchill Res
Sun 11 May 3:00PM **Bentleigh Greens v Westgate** Kingston Heath

Round 7
Sat 17 May 3:00PM **Keilor Park v Bulleen Royals** Keilor Park Res
Sat 17 May 3:00PM **Langwarrin v Dandenong Thunder** Lawton Park Res
Sat 17 May 3:00PM **Southern Stars v Bentleigh Greens** Ross Res
Sat 17 May 7:00PM **Westgate v FC Clifton Hil**l Ardeer Res
Sun 18 May 3:00PM **St Albans Saints v Kingston City** Churchill Res
Sun 18 May 6:15PM **Springvale White Eagles v Sunshine Georgies** Serbian Sports

Round 8
Fri 23 May 8:30PM **Kingston City v Keilor Par**k Grange Res
Sat 24 May 3:00PM **Sunshine Georgies v St Albans Saints** Chaplin Res
Sat 24 May 3:00PM **FC Clifton Hill v Southern Stars** Kevin Bartlett Res
Sat 24 May 3:00PM **Bulleen Royals v Langwarrin** Veneto Social Club
Sat 24 May 7:00PM **Dandenong Thunder v Westgate** George Andrews Res
Sun 25 May 3:00PM **Bentleigh Greens v Springvale White Eagles** Kingston Heath

Round 9
Sat 31 May 3:00PM **Langwarrin v Keilor Park** Lawton Park Res
Sat 31 May 3:00PM **Southern Stars v Dandenong Thunder** Ross Res
Sat 31 May 3:00PM **Sunshine Georgies v Kingston City** Chaplin Res
Sat 31 May 7:00PM **Westgate v Bulleen Royals** Ardeer Res
Sun 1 Jun 3:00PM **St Albans Saints v Bentleigh Greens** Churchill Res
Sun 1 Jun 6:15PM **Springvale White Eagles v FC Clifton Hill** Serbian Sports

Round 10
Sat 7 Jun 3:00PM **Langwarrin v Kingston City** Lawton Park Res
Sat 7 Jun 3:00PM **Bulleen Royals v Southern Stars** Veneto Social Club
Sat 7 Jun 3:00PM **Keilor Park v Westgate** Keilor Park Res
Sat 7 Jun 3:00PM **FC Clifton Hill v St Albans Saints** Kevin Bartlett Res
Sat 7 Jun 7:00PM **Dandenong Thunder v S'vale White Eagles** George Andrews Res
Sun 8 Jun 3:00PM Bentleigh Greens v Sunshine Georgies Kingston Heath

Round 11
Fri 13 Jun 8:30PM **Kingston City v Bentleigh Greens** Grange Res
Sat 14 Jun 3:00PM **Southern Stars v Keilor Park** Ross Res
Sat 14 Jun 3:00PM **Sunshine Georgies v FC Clifton Hill** Chaplin Res
Sat 14 Jun 7:00PM **Westgate v Langwarrin** Ardeer Res
Sun 15 Jun 3:00PM **St Albans Saints v Dandenong Thunder** Churchill Res
Sun 15 Jun 6:15PM **Springvale White Eagles v Bulleen Royals** Serbian Sports

Round 12
Fri 20 Jun 8:30PM **Kingston City v Westgate** Grange Res
Sat 21 Jun 3:00PM **Sunshine Georgies v Dandenong Thunder** Chaplin Res
Sat 21 Jun 3:00PM **Southern Stars v Langwarrin** Ross Res
Sun 22 Jun 3:00PM **Bentleigh Greens v FC Clifton Hill** Kingston Heath
Sun 22 Jun 3:00PM **St Albans Saints v Bulleen Royals** Churchill Res
Sun 22 Jun 6:15PM **Springvale White Eagles v Keilor Park** Serbian Sports

Round 13
Sat 28 Jun 3:00PM **Langwarrin v Springvale White Eagles** Lawton Park Res
Sat 28 Jun 3:00PM **Keilor Park v St Albans Saints** Keilor Park Res
Sat 28 Jun 3:00PM **Bulleen Royals v Sunshine Georgies** Veneto Social Club
Sat 28 Jun 3:00PM **FC Clifton Hill v Kingston City** Kevin Bartlett Res
Sat 28 Jun 7:00PM **Westgate v Southern Stars** Ardeer Res
Sat 28 Jun 7:00PM **Dandenong Thunder v Bentleigh Greens** George Andrews Res

Round 14
Fri 4 Jul 8:30PM **Kingston City v Southern Stars** Grange Res
Sat 5 Jul 3:00PM **FC Clifton Hill v Dandenong Thunder** Kevin Bartlett Res
Sat 5 Jul 3:00PM **Sunshine Georgies v Keilor Park** Chaplin Res
Sun 6 Jul 3:00PM **Bentleigh Greens v Bulleen Royals** Kingston Heath
Sun 6 Jul 3:00PM **St Albans Saints v Langwarrin** Churchill Res
Sun 6 Jul 6:15PM **Springvale White Eagles v Westgate** Serbian Sports

Round 15
Sat 12 Jul 3:00PM **Southern Stars v Springvale White Eagles** Ross Res
Sat 12 Jul 3:00PM **Langwarrin v Sunshine Georgies** Lawton Park Res
Sat 12 Jul 3:00PM **Keilor Park v Bentleigh Greens** Keilor Park Res
Sat 12 Jul 3:00PM **Bulleen Royals v FC Clifton Hill** Veneto Social Club
Sat 12 Jul 7:00PM **Westgate v St Albans Saints** Ardeer Res
Sat 12 Jul 7:00PM **Dandenong Thunder v Kingston City** George Andrews Res

Could it be the year of the Bentleigh Greens?

Round 16
Fri 18 Jul 8:30PM **Kingston City v Springvale White Eagles** Grange Res
Sat 19 Jul 3:00PM **FC Clifton Hill v Keilor Park** Kevin Bartlett Res
Sat 19 Jul 3:00PM **Sunshine Georgies v Westgate** Chaplin Res
Sat 19 Jul 7:00PM **Dandenong Thunder v Bulleen Royals** George Andrews Res
Sun 20 Jul 3:00PM **Bentleigh Greens v Langwarrin** Kingston Heath
Sun 20 Jul 3:00PM **St Albans Saints v Southern Stars** Churchill Res

Round 17
Sat 26 Jul 3:00PM **Southern Stars v Sunshine Georgies** Ross Res
Sat 26 Jul 3:00PM **Bulleen Royals v Kingston City** Veneto Social Club
Sat 26 Jul 3:00PM **Langwarrin v FC Clifton Hill** Lawton Park Res
Sat 26 Jul 3:00PM **Keilor Park v Dandenong Thunder** Keilor Park Res
Sat 26 Jul 7:00PM **Westgate v Bentleigh Green**s Ardeer Res
Sun 27 Jul 6:15PM **Springvale White Eagles v St Albans Saints** Serbian Sports

Round 18
Fri 1 Aug 8:30PM **Kingston City v St Albans Saints** Grange Res
Sat 2 Aug 3:00PM **Bulleen Royals v Keilor Park** Veneto Social Club
Sat 2 Aug 3:00PM **FC Clifton Hill v Westgate** Kevin Bartlett Res
Sat 2 Aug 3:00PM **Sunshine Georgies v Springvale White Eagles** Chaplin Res
Sat 2 Aug 7:00PM **Dandenong Thunder v Langwarrin** George Andrews Res
Sun 3 Aug 3:00PM **Bentleigh Greens v Southern Stars** Kingston Heath

The Sunshine Georgies will be hoping it can bounce back to the Foxtel Cup at a first attempt.

Round 19
Sat 9 Aug 3:00PM **Keilor Park v Kingston City** Keilor Park Res
Sat 9 Aug 3:00PM **Southern Stars v FC Clifton Hill** Ross Res
Sat 9 Aug 3:00PM **Langwarrin v Bulleen Royals** Lawton Park Res
Sat 9 Aug 7:00PM **Westgate v Dandenong Thunder** Ardeer Res
Sun 10 Aug 3:00PM **St Albans Saints v Sunshine Georgies** Churchill Res
Sun 10 Aug 6:15PM **Springvale White Eagles v Bentleigh Greens** Serbian Sports

Round 20
Fri 22 Aug 8:30PM **Kingston City v Sunshine Georgies** Grange Res
Sat 23 Aug 3:00PM **Keilor Park v Langwarrin** Keilor Park Res
Sat 23 Aug 3:00PM **Bulleen Royals v Westgate** Veneto Social Club
Sat 23 Aug 3:00PM **FC Clifton Hill v Springvale White Eagles** Kevin Bartlett Res
Sat 23 Aug 7:00PM **Dandenong Thunder v Southern Stars** George Andrews Res
Sun 24 Aug 3:00PM **Bentleigh Greens v St Albans Saints** Kingston Heath

Round 21
Fri 29 Aug 8:30PM **Kingston City v Langwarrin** Grange Res
Sat 30 Aug 3:00PM **Sunshine Georgies v Bentleigh Greens** Chaplin Res
Sat 30 Aug 3:00PM **Southern Stars v Bulleen Royals** Ross Res
Sat 30 Aug 7:00PM **Westgate v Keilor Park** Ardeer Res
Sun 31 Aug 3:00PM **St Albans Saints v FC Clifton Hill** Churchill Res
Sun 31 Aug 6:15PM **Springvale White Eagles v Dandenong Thunder** Serbian Sports

Round 22
Sun 6 Sep 3:00PM **Langwarrin v Westgate** Lawton Park Res
Sun 6 Sep 3:00PM **Keilor Park v Southern Stars** Keilor Park Res
Sun 6 Sep 3:00PM **Bulleen Royals v Springvale White Eagles** Veneto Social Club
Sun 6 Sep 3:00PM **Dandenong Thunder v St Albans Saints** George Andrews Res
Sun 6 Sep 3:00PM **FC Clifton Hill v Sunshine Georgies** Kevin Bartlett Res
Sun 6 Sep 3:00PM **Bentleigh Greens v Kingston City** Kingston Heath

Draw Notes:

CATCH-UP ROUND - 15th August 20 - Clubs will be notified by FFV of matches to be played on this weekend during the course of the season.

CLUBS ARE ADVISED TO VERIFY THEIR FIXTURES REGULARLY VIA RESULTS VAULT AND THE FFV WEBSITE FOR ANY CHANGES THROUGHOUT THE COURSE OF THE SEASON.

The Saints Albans Saints will hope to march the distance this time around after its campaign seemingly ran out of gas towards the business end of the season last year.

WHEN MAGIC COMPLETED THE VPL THREEPEAT

As one of only four clubs to have claimed the magical and elusive threepeat throughout 50 years of Victorian State League and Premier League football, Altona Magic thoroughly deserves to be recognised as one of the states most successful football clubs.

On the 17th of September 1995, Olympic Park played host to what would be the first of three consecutive grand finals appearances over the coming years for the Magic. Under the tutelage of Gary Cole,

Altona needed a bit of magic from former Socceroo John Markovski to win their first grand final, when with the scores deadlocked on 90 mins at 2-2, he rose up to finish a cross from Jimmy Rooney Medal winner Chris Emsovski and sealed a 3-2 victory in a classic final. That first title set the tone for the following years and Paisley Park could look forward to a period of success both on and off the field.

In 1996 Altona Magic had a new and young president in Mrs. Millissa Fischer, who was no stranger to success after overseeing Springvale White Eagles as president to claim a championship in 1995, as well as repeating the dose with Ringwood City. With a new ambitious President, as well as the recruitment of now club legend Sash Becvinovski, the Magic steamrolled their way to the final, facing Heidelberg United in what was a tightly contested affair. It was three-all at the end of normal and extra time and it took a penalty shootout to decide the winner. Darren McGrath was the hero for the Magic, saving Brian McNichol's spot-kick while all five Magic players converted theirs. Henry Velkovski's final penalty caused coach Gary Cole to lose his hair, since he had promised to shave it off if the midfielder scored the winning goal.

In 1997 Altona Magic added Sava Rusmir and George Jolevski to its championship winning team but this time went into the final with the tag of underdogs as their opponents Bulleen held superiority throughout the season. Altona Magic with President Mrs. Millissa Fischer at the helm had rung the changes throughout the season culminating in Ian Dobson returning to coach the team following the sackings of both Gary Cole and Zoran Trajceski. All pre-match indications pointed to a Bulleen victory, but the Magic had a surprise in store with a narrow Grand Final win by 4-2 after extra time. Two goals to Damon Collina kept Bulleen on track but Simon Micevski and Sash Becvinovski replied for the Magic, while Zdravko Atanasovski's cross was deflected for an own goal and in the 110min Becvinovski made the VPL threepeat secure in extra-time. Sava Rusmir went on to pick up the Jimmy Rooney Medal and Ian Dobson had coached the Magic to its third successive title and his second with the club.

The all conquering Altona Magic side from 1996

By Arthur Papas

Photo courtesy Altona Magic

JUNIOR FOOTBALL AT ALTONA MAGIC RECEIVES COACHING BOOST

Junior football programs have been given a huge priority this season by Altona Magic President Millissa Fischer.

To confirm the clubs commitment to the development of the game they have enlisted ex Sheffield United coach and professional player Doug Hodgson who has agreed to join Altona Magic for season 2008 as Director of Coaching. Doug comes to the club with an excellent reputation for developing and motivating junior players of all ages and standards.

His responsibilities will include the reorganisation and development of all junior players and coaches at the club. The aim is to identify and develop the potential of players as they progress to the next level of their playing career, instil a sense of professionalism into the junior program and to put Altona firmly at the forefront of junior soccer development in Victoria.

In addition to Doug's appointment Altona juniors will be further enhanced by the appointment of the following senior players as coaches:

Peter Zois - Goalkeeper who has just returned from 9 years as a professional footballer having spent his entire professional career in the Dutch First Division.

Carl Recchia - Classy midfielder who spent season one in the A-League with Melbourne Victory and one of the premier players in the Foxtel Cup.

Steve Laurie - Former Australian U17 captain as well having spent 3 seasons with English Premeir League club West Ham.

Henry Fa'arodo - Current Solomon Island international having also played NSL and A-league in season one with Perth Glory.

Todd McSorley - Recruited from the SA Best Premier League having also spent time with the South Australian Institute of Sport under the tutelage of now Joey's coach Martyn Crook.

Altona Magic cater for the very young (Small Sided Games U/6,U/7 and U/8) to Juniors Boys (U/9-U/18). Altona Magic are renowned for the success and professionalism of their senior setup and as a club offer a pathway for young players that other clubs can't match.

For more info visit our new website www.altonamagicsc.com.au and be quick to register your interest for season 2008.

THE VICTORIAN FOOTBALL SHOW

EVERY WEDNESDAY 8.30PM

31

THIS WEEK

Melbourne Knights v Altona Magic

Oakleigh Cannons v Heidelberg Warriors

Richmond Eagles v Green Gully Cavaliers

BRINGING YOU ALL THE WEEKEND ACTION TO YOUR LOUNGEROOM

BOO'S WORLD

With Mark Boric

A great build up for this week's A League Grand Final between the Central Coast Mariners and the Newcastle Jets. Only three seasons in it has become a major Australian sporting occasion. Sadly we in Victoria were left to follow it from afar, after a disastrous season for the Melbourne Victory.

The news from the Victory camp this week was that they finally parted company with the wayward Ljubo Milicevic. He is now being sought by a large contingent of clubs, offering him all manner of Gold Memberships and Drinks Cards and other VIP priveliges.

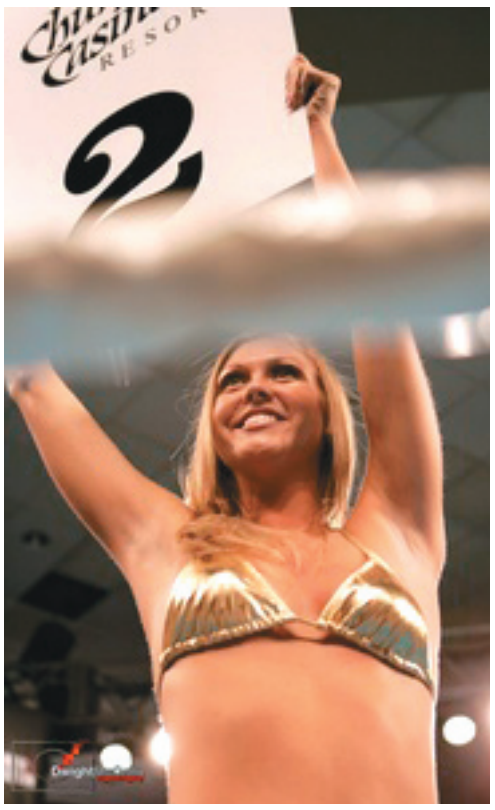
Confirmation this week that four teams will be relegated from the Foxtel Cup at season's end, with a flow on effect through the lower leagues. A season which commenced before this point was made clear, as has become the custom of the FFV. I for one welcome the day when the FFV will chose not to reveal the number of promotion/relegation places until the season is over.

A couple of weeks after the end of the season all the FFV senior clubs could gather at a meeting, at which a giant number would be held up which revealed everyone's fate. Everyone could witness first hand the moment promotion dreams were realised and relegation heartbreak hit in. It would be great theatre. Host it in a theatre, sell tickets. Put my fellow columnist Katsa on the door, and after the announcent he could usher the winners into a special party room where the J.Walker and champagne were on ice. To the losers he would point to the taxi rank where drivers were looking up the Melways (or GPS Systems) for directions to the West Gate Bridge.

The A League will be expanding, with Townsville and Gold Coast entering the competition. A youth league is also being introduced, and it will be interesting to see the effect this has on the various State/ Premier leagues.

It's hard to see the push to have the upper tier venues upgraded making much headway with so many local councils being clueless or unwilling to help. This season has seen grounds hastily repaired in the last week before the season commenced and now Altona Magic's turf will get much needed treatment after the season has commenced.

It wouldn't surprise me in the slightest if the council contractors were to turn up in the middle of a game declaring it was time to start work (well, that probably is a fair stretch) and try and plant some "Keep off the Grass" signs on the edge of the penalty area as Peter Zois tried lining up a defensive wall for a free-kick.



Ding! Ding! The VPL relegation system takes a new twist in deciding who stays up and who goes down.

Frankston Pines flew up to Canberra this week. Not to seek an apology from Kevin Rudd or watch his cardboard cut-out do it's stuff in Parliament, but to play a game against the AIS in a VPL first.

A stolen car was apparently burnt at the Jukes Road ground last week on the eve of the Fawkner v Melbourne Knights clash. I'm using this as inspiration for a scene in my as yet untitled Australian football hooligan movie, in which the Wurundjeri Way Elite drive a stolen station wagon, with the rear loaded with flares or perhaps even towing a trailer full of flares, down the ambulance ramp at Telstra Dome and onto the pitch during an Asian Champions League game against Urawa Red Diamonds.

In an effort to put one up on the energetic Japanese fans, the wagon is parked in front of them, doused in petrol and set alight to ignite a spectacular fireshow.

All the while the WWE chant racist abuse and WWII atomic bomb references at visitors from the land of the Rising Sun (Japan that is, not the pub in Richmond).

Until next week, if the good Lord's willing and the Yarra don't rise.

KATSA'S KORNER

With George Katsamboukas

KATSA'S KORNER 0-2

SEEK AND YOU SHALL FIND

Melbourne's punters were looking for 3 things this week. Illegal copies of "Underbelly", FFV fixtures for State and Provisional Leagues, and grounds to play pre-season friendly games on.

The "House of Darebin" delivered on Thursday when they posted their fixtures on the FFV website.

As for Underbelly, I hear that down Werribee way, box sets are available at a price. I cannot wait to see the legal version…..

ON THE MOVE?

As for grounds for pre-season matches, local councils are protecting their grounds as much as I protect the bottle of J Walker Gold that I have!

The "House of Darebin" could be on the move, with FFV CEO Mark Rendell announcing that the "Football Family" needed larger premises to cope with its growth over the years. Perhaps a more central location would be an idea Mark?

HEAVEN'S ABOVE

Friday night Melbourne put on its worst weather for Friday Night Football.
The Commodore had a short drive to Jack's Place, where the Oakleigh Cannons took on the Bergers. I scored the match at one half each, with the final result being a scoreless draw.

A healthy crowd turned out dry, and left wet, with the biggest decision that they had to make on the night, was whether to leave the umbrella up or down.

Over to Richmondland we go and it was a perfect night for the half time Black Forest cake and coffee. Not so perfect for the Cavaliers who lost 2-0.

Chatz's Chargers made it two from two and they have made the perfect start to the season.

NO COMMENT

After the various Foxtel Cup matches I see the various media lads milling around the coaches to seek their words of wisdom as to how the match panned out.

Some of these media lads ask me why I never participate in these interviews.

The answer is quite simple.
Leave the technical stuff to the experienced journo's, I don't have the heart to interview these coaches who will one day inevitably end up on Katsa's Scoreboard.

By the way, there are three types of coaches:
One that is about to be sacked.
One that has been sacked.
One that is trying very hard to avoid being sacked.

Six weeks to go before the State and Provisional Leagues kick off, and the power brokers at these clubs are busy trying to find players to fill their rosters for 2008.

Their mobile phone bills, not to mention petrol bills sky rocket during this period. So do their ulcers, hair loss and insomnia, as they have to listen to the financial demands of some of these prospective players.

Add to this the increased pressure to survive as the number of teams that will be Westgated (relegated) has not gone back to the traditional two per league, but to three with the exception of the Foxtel Cup and State League one, where the number will match the number of lanes of the Westgate Bridge, four.

GET LOST!

GPS Navigation Systems have become quite popular these days, and will assist players to get to their away games much easier than before.

There was nothing worst for me back in my playing days, apologies, appearance days, as I was hardly a player, than to try and balance the Melways, a Big Mac, and a W N Field, whilst at the same time, try and steer the Commodore.

But then again, if I had a GPS and no need for a Melways, this would have freed up one hand so as I can hold a glass of J Walker?
Talk around the traps is that the A-League will soon have 2 new teams, one from the Gold Coast, the other from Townsville.

I try to get lost, but everyone always tells me where to go!

FOLLOW THE SUN

Do not be surprised if Victory's Box Trifecta is broken up shortly, with Merrick, Healy or Cole heading to a more tropical climate to take charge of Townsville.

Do some research as to who will be funding Townsville and who did this person always employ as her coach, sorry did I say her?

Some word association:
Masochism – Leaving the warmth of home to go and watch a Foxtel Cup match on a cold, wet Friday night.

Until next week,

This is Katsa – Just as you've known him.

ADELAIDE BLUE EAGLES CELEBRATE

50 years for South Aussie Azzuri

One of South Australia's most prominent clubs, Adelaide Blue Eagles will be reaching a significant club milestone as they compete in this year's Super League Competition and getting their hands on some silverware would be the icing on the cake.

"This year the club celebrates its 50th Anniversary with many special events throughout the year, culminating in a Gala dinner at the Convention Centre, featuring Kate Ceberano", announced long standing club Chairman Rep Giordano, who himself creates history by entering his 27th year as Chairman of the Blue Eagles. Optimistic about the 2008 season he added, "The senior team should return to its former glory with the acquisition of some quality players. This has strengthened the team and the club expects no less than a top three finish in the ladder and with some luck, to win the playoffs."

Adelaide Blue Eagles celebrate winning the SA championship in 2001.

The club's history dates back to 1957 when a group of Italian boys met regularly to play street soccer. The club was then founded in 1958 when the first official meeting was held. Initially named Napoli Sports Club, but due to the SA Soccer Association's ruling of not allowing two Italian named clubs, they played under the name of Eastern Districts with Angelo Rossi elected as President and Luigi Penna as Secretary who were the driving force. The inaugural Senior team Captain was Vincenzo Ferrero. The club entered a team in the Metropolitan League in 1959 under the Chairmanship of the then Mayor of Campbelltown Owen Atkinson and played its first game against Edinburgh, losing 11-1. Initially all home games were played at the Victoria Racecourse, then South Park, Park Terrace Goodwood followed by Adey Reserve Firle before moving to its current complex at Marden in the year 2000.
In 1962 the club played under the adopted name of Eastern Districts Napoli and in 1966 changed to Eastern Districts Azzurri. In 1968 the club amalgamated with Seacliff Austria which enabled them to acquire a place in the 1st Division. It wasn't until 1993 that the club started to use its current name of Adelaide Blue Eagles. The parent name of the club remained Azzurri Sports Club Inc.

Since its inception, the club has been extremely successful particularly in the period from the early 90's to the mid 2000's, establishing itself as one of the leaders of the game in South Australia. But the club's success has come from all different levels within the game of football through administration and facilities, coaching, playing, presentation and community involvement. Their current stadium, the Marden Sports Complex is second only to Hindmarsh Stadium with many international playing sides and competitions using its quality facilities. These include Japanese J-League teams Yokohama and Consoladole Sapporo, AC Milan U21 squad, Olyroos squads, 2004 Oceania Football Confederation Qualifiers, SA leg of the Vodafone National 5-aside competition, Allan Shearer 'Down Under' where the football star conducted the 2nd of 4 national coaching clinics with Andrew Paschalidis as MC as part of an Umbro promotional tour, 2006 Women's Asian Cup preliminary round games and the National Police and Fire Games.

The Adelaide Blue Eagles on-field performances have at times been unprecedented. After being promoted to the 1st Division in 1967, the ultimate goal of a Div 1 Championship eluded them for 22 years but the hard road travelled made their success in 1981 even the more sweeter. Not only were they the Rothman's League Div 1 Champions but they went on to win every available trophy in that same year.
1982 saw continuing success with an amazing 38 game undefeated streak. Another championship and trophy wins saw the club establish itself as a force in S.A. football. 1983 & 1984 saw the club win back to back Ampol Cups, beating such opponents as Adelaide City & West Adelaide. The 1980's also saw the club consolidate a strong junior policy with teams in all competitions. This was proven a major boost for the First Team, with many players rising through the ranks. Into the 1992 Season and The Blues regained status as the 'champagne' side of soccer, with a convincing Minor Premiers and Top Five Playoff win. In 1993 the Adelaide Blue Eagles were again Minor Premiers and 1994 saw another championship success in the inaugural Premier League. 1995 saw a League and Cup double and 1996 made up a hat-trick of Championship wins. Back to back Federation Cup wins in 97 and 98 along with Championships in 2000, 2001 and 2003 have maintained the club's image as one of the most successful clubs in South Australia.

A look at club honours shows some of SA's top players have been an integral part of the Blue Eagles success. The Club can boast four players that have been awarded SA League Player of the Year Medal, Terry Wetton (1970), John Francis (1984), Andy Read (1991) an Corey Artone (2001). Others who have left their mark are players such as Frank Schafer, Wally Bojzuk, Stewart Blair, Gary Morretti and the Hollywood connection Anthony La Paglia. There were also the outstanding players such as Jan Kierno (Polonia/Blue Eagles) in the 80's often referred to as "The General" or "The Master" who totally dominated and controlled the play in the games he played. He also went on by contributing to the club as a Senior Coach for 6 seasons. At the turn of the century in the early 2,000's a dynamic duo from Adelaide Blue Eagles that turned heads were Corey Artone and Michael Brooks. Corey with his impressive control of midfield and his deadly passing ability, as mentioned before won him a Player of the Year Award. SA Champion player Michael Brooks, who also won a Player of the Year Medal in 1996 but with White City Woodville, was a goal scorer extraordinaire, topping the goal scoring charts and winning the League's Golden Boot Award in 1996, 2000, 2001 and 2002. Their lethal combination and understanding partnership played an integral part in the Blue Eagles winning the 2000 and 2001 League Championships.

Then there was Zoran Karadzic, one of the most highly achieved player/coaches of the club's history. A brilliant midfielder who demoralised defences when playing for the Blue Eagles, but could also score goals, particularly lethal from free kick situations. Achieving as a player for the Eagles, Zoran went on to have tremendous success as the club's Senior Coach from 1994 to the early 2,000's, leading them to winning championships in 94, 95, 96, 2000 and 2001, along with numerous other cup titles, overwhelmingly the most successful coach at the Eagles while they were in their heyday. In 2003 the former Yugoslavian U21 National Coach Dragan Sipka was brought out from Serbia by the club to take up the position as senior coach. His experience proved invaluable, taking the club to yet another Premier League Championship and being rewarded for his achievement with the Coach of the Year Award for 2003. More recently the acquisition of Diego Pelligrini from Italy, former UEFA Cup winner with FC Parma and AC Mantova ex-player, gives the side his international experience and maturity. His command in the central defence is the strength of the side's back line today. His role within the club has been as a player as well as coach in '06 & '07 passing on much needed experience to the younger players. Of course, along with those people mentioned, there have also been many others that have given valuable and wonderful contributors to not only their club Blue Eagles, but to the game in general.

Chairman of Adelaide Blue Eagles Mr Rep Giordano, now in his 27th year as chairman.

So as the 2008 season prepares to kick off on the 15th March, we wish the Adelaide Blue Eagles, a club rich in tradition, success and deeply entrenched in SA football history, a very Happy 50th Anniversary. May all their aspirations and expectations for the 2008 season come true!

SOUTH AUTSRALIA

By Nat Adamopoulos

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NEWCOMERS SHOCK FAVOURITES IN NSWPL OPENER

Upsets galore greets first round of Telechoice Premier League

The first major upset in this year's NSW Premier League arrived in the very first match, with promoted West Sydney Berries outplaying Sydney Olympic at the Homebush Athletic Centre to win 3-1.

Olympic made only two changes to the side that had lifted the Johnny Warren Cup last week, while the Berries featured several Olympic old boys in their ranks, including Kosta Lagoudakis, Jack Sobczyk and Josh Sama, all of whom turned out for Olympic last season.

It was Sama who had the first shot of the game, on five minutes. At the other end, Matthew Mayora strolled through the suspect Berries defence a minute later, but made a horrible mess of his eventual shot.

Despite the danger posed by the Berries' Ryan Jones on the left, Olympic were moving into the ascendancy. Shannon Cole's set-pieces were a danger as always; on 12 minutes, his inswinging corner from the right was headed just wide by Michael Cindric.

After another half-chance for Sama, Olympic went into a deserved lead on 16 minutes. A long throw from Mayora on the right found the Berries' 'keeper Hamish McLean out of goal, and Michael Cindric's back-header gently looped into the empty net.

Olympic continued to dominate, and should have gone further ahead in the subsequent minutes. Mayora squandered two more good chances, one following good work on the left by Ian Ramsay and the other following a defensive lapse by Michael Cunico. McLean was eventually tested by another insidious free kick from Shannon Cole, but the Berries' gloveman was up to the challenge.

The away side's chances continued. Switching flanks, Ramsay cut the ball back to the hapless Mayora, whose shot this time found the bar. Just before half-time, the ball broke to Roger Galayini in the centre after another Olympic offensive on the right; Galayini's shot fizzed wide.

If the first half had been all Olympic, the second half was a mirror image…except that the Berries took their chances.

Scott Baillie's men came out much sharper and more committed to attack after the break. Although Cole had the first chance of the half with a looping cross-cum-shot from the left, which was palmed over by McLean, the Berries deservedly equalized on 53 minutes.

A deep cross from the right from Sash Tirovski coincided with a clever run into the box by the ever-dangerous Ryan Jones, who briskly controlled the ball and shot past Michael Herbert with his left foot.

McLean was called into action again soon afterwards, from yet another Cole free kick; he was unable to hold the curling right-footer, but Mayora was unable to direct the subsequent header properly, only finding the grateful arms of McLean. Then, from a similar position, Cole finally beat the Berries' 'keeper…but his free kick skidded off the far post.

Soon enough, the Berries went ahead. After Herbert had tipped over a looping free kick from Kosta Lagoudakis, John Tsironis nipped in to head the resulting corner past the Olympic custodian. 2-1 to the home side.

In a bid to stiffen his midfield, which had faded from view in the second half, Olympic boss Milan Blagojevic replaced Mayora with off-season signing Anthony Hartshorn. The sequel, however, was a period of increased dominance by the Berries, with Olympic eventually resorting to pointless long balls in the direction of the remaining striker, Paul Wither.

Sash Tirovski nearly set Tsironis away for another goal, but his sublime pass was mis-controlled on 75 minutes. Tirovski was not to be denied, though, and scored the Berries' final goal himself after a free kick rebounded to him on the edge of the box; coolly rounding his man, his left-foot shot left Herbert with no chance.

A great start for the competition new boys, and an early setback for the ever-ambitious Olympic.

West Sydney Berries 3 (Jones, Tsironis, Tirovski)
Sydney Olympic 1 (Cindric)

West Sydney Berries: McLean; Fotiadis, Petratis, Sobczyk, Kotsopoulos; Tirovski, Lagoudakis (Baillie), Cunico, Jones; Sama (Paradisis), Tsironis (Philippou).

Sydney Olympic: Herbert; Giannaros, Jurilj, Cindric, Cole; Musumeci, Galayini (Zorbas), Triantis, Ramsay; Mayora (Hartshorn), Wither.

MVP Points:

3 – Ryan Jones (WSB). A constant menace to Olympic, he scored the crucial equalizer, and provided the main option for the Berries out wide throughout.

2 – Sash Tirovski (WSB). Came into his own in the second half as his side grew in confidence, and scored a fine goal.

1 – Shannon Cole (Olympic). Always the player the Berries were most worried about. Heaven only knows why he is being wasted at left-back.

In a round of shocks, both last year's finalists were beaten at home; champions Blacktown crashed 3-1 to Sydney United, while Bankstown went down 3-0 to Manly. The Sutherland Sharks continued their good form from the Johnny Warren Cup, defeating APIA 4-1 at home, while Marconi could only draw 1-1 at Bossley Park with Macarthur. Wollongong and Penrith drew 0-0.

FOOTBALL NSW

By Mike Salter in Sydney
Photos by Carlos Furtado

SOUTH HOBART LANDS BACK ON EARTH

Scoreless draw follows previous 10 goal romp

Hot favourites South Hobart made a dismal start to the southern Tasmanian Summer Cup competition when they could only manage a goalless draw with Hobart Olympic in Group A.

South Hobart coach Ken Morton rested six key players in the mistaken belief that his side could overwhelm Olympic, but the move backfired badly.

South may have won 10-0 in their first match in the northern Tasmanian Steve Hudson Cup competition the previous weekend, but the southern tournament is a completely different kettle of fish.

The rules of this competition call for a penalty shoot-out in the case of drawn matches, with the winner earning a bonus point.

Fortunately for Morton, his side won the penalty shoot-out and came away with two points. Anything less may have meant curtains for South as there are no semi-finals in the competition and the winners of Group A meet the winners of Group B in the final.

Metro have hit the wall after a promising start in which they won their opening games in both the northern and southern competitions.

In their second game in the Steve Hudson Cup competition, they went down 3-2 to Prospect Knights, while on Friday in the southern tournament, they were hammered 5-0 by Hobart Olympic in a Group A match.

Ben Backhaus, Michael Bulis and Courtney Winter powered Olympic to a 3-0 lead at the break, while Carl Larzabal and Nick Meredith completed the job in the second half in teeming rain.

In Friday evening's second fixture, University scraped home 1-0 against Taroona, the goal coming from a penalty by Alexis Bull. The penalty was awarded when Taroona defenders Stefano Flonta and Barry Hagan sandwiched University's Derryn Zucco on the byline to the right of the goal.

Taroona might easily have won this game. In the opening half, Chris Cox and William Roberts were unlucky when they hit the University woodwork.

On Saturday, cup-holders Tilford Zebras won their second match in a row to top Group B when they beat Kingborough Lions United 2-1 in heavy rain at South Hobart.

The Lions took the lead on the stroke of half-time after a delightful build-up out of defence ended with Peter While slotting home Willie Walker's low cross from the right.

Ben Crosswell made it 1-1 eight minutes after the resumption when he headed home Brett Pullen's cross from the left.

Pullen scored the winner midway through the half after good work by Daniel Lapolla.

New Town Eagles grabbed their first win from two outings when they sneaked home 1-0 against Clarence United in Group B at South Hobart on Saturday.

Poor defensive play by Clarence enabled Matthew Rybak to score for Eagles early in the game.

Clarence should have been level early in the second half when Eagles' Scott Telega conceded a penalty by flattening Dwayne Walsh.

Kenyi Emmanueli made a complete hash of his spot-kick, however, placing the ball wide of the goal.

South Hobart and Metro would have the chance on Sunday to atone for their failings by travelling north to Launceston to meet Northern Rangers and Riverside Olympic, respectively, in the Steve Hudson Cup.

South Hobart coach Ken Morton promised the supporters he would not tempt fate again and that he would field his strongest line-up.

South's cause has been hindered by the news that key central defender Nathan Robinson is out for the season because of damaged knee ligaments, while ace midfielder Bart Beecroft is still injured.

South Hobart FC lines up prior to its Summer Cup game against Hobart .

FOOTBALL FEDERATION TASMANIA

By Walter Pless
Photos by Walter Pless

A bit of this, that & the other...

ON THE BOX

English Premier League

Tues Feb 26	**Manchester City v Everton**	
6.55 am		Fox Sports 1
Sun Mar 2	**Manchester City v Wigan**	
4.10 am		Fox Sports 3
Mon Mar 3	**Bolton v Liverpool**	
12.25 am		Fox Sports 1
Mon Mar 3	**Everton v Portsmouth**	
2.55 am		Fox Sports 1

Total Football

Thurs Feb 28 7.30 pm Fox Sports 1

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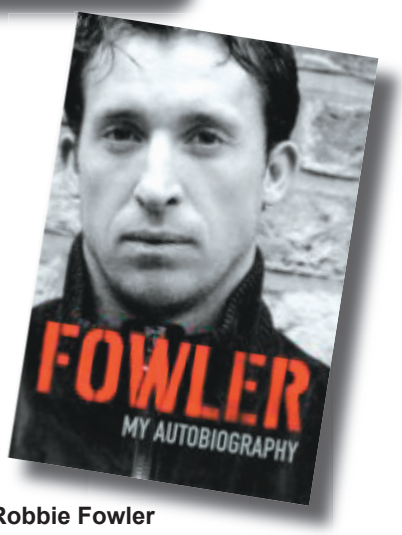

Synopsis

Pronounced as the greatest goalscoring talent since Jimmy Greaves, 17-year old Robbie Fowler was immediately catapulted to fame and fortune. The thin, baby-faced Toxteth lad, who had trampled the same streets as the rioters, was now a millionaire, an idol and inspiration to every kid who kicked a football. Yet his incredible potential was never quite realized. Injuries and persistent rumours of drug abuse and depression meant that he never became the world-beater so many predicted. This is a fascinating and unbelievably frank insight into the beautiful game, and a candid account of an incredible career, taking us behind the closed doors of professional football to expose what really happens at both club and international level.

Robbie Fowler
RRP: $37.00

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Q. After scoring 171 goals in 330 appearances for Liverpool which team did Robbie join after leaving Anfield?

a. Leicester City
b. Leeds United
c. Luton Town

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A QUESTION OF WORLD CUP ? ? ? ?

1. Who are the only team to have played at every World Cup Finals?

.....

2. In which year were 3 points for a win first introduced to the group stages of the World Cup finals?

.....

3. Who won the golden boot in the 1990 World Cup despite having only played one game for his country prior to the World Cup?

.....

4. What was the name of the dog who found the World Cup in 1966 after it had been stolen?

.....

5. Why did India withdraw from the 1950 World Cup? Because FIFA wouldn't allow them to play barefoot, because FIFA wouldn't allow them to play in trousers or because they couldn't afford to travel to Brazil?

.....

6.In which city did every match from the 1930 World Cup take place?

.....

7. What type of animal was World Cup Willie, the mascot for the 1966 World Cup?

.....

8. Why was the USA versus Switzerland match in 1994 different to any other World Cup match that had been played before?

.....

9. Which 40 year old captained the 1982 World Cup winners, Italy?

.....

10. What record did Oleg Salenko set in the World Cup match between Russia and Cameroon at USA94?

.....

11. The oldest player to score a goal at a World Cup Finals was Roger Milla for Cameroon. Do you know how old he was?

.....

12. At age 17, who is the youngest player to score a goal in a World Cup Finals?

.....

13. At the World Cup Finals in Spain in 1982 Hungary defeated El Salvador by a record margin. What was the score?

.....

14. The only man to coach five different countries in World Cup history is Yugoslavian Bora Milutinovic. With which teams did he achieve the astonishing feat?

.....

15. Who is the only man to captain and coach a World Cup winning team?

.....

16. With 15 goals which Brazilian holds the record for the most goals scored at World Cup Finals?

.....

17. Zaïre ('74), Canada ('86), Greece ('94), the Dutch East Indies ('38) and China ('02) share a distinct and perhaps unwanted World Cup record. Can you guess what it is?

.....

What was the name of this World Cup wonder mutt?

Answers

1. Brazil, 2. 1986, 3. Italy's Toto Schillaci 4. Pickles, 5. Bare feet, 6. Montevideo, Uruguay 7. Lion, 8. First time a match had been played under a closed roof (Detroit's Pontiac Silverdome), 9. Italy's Dino Zoff, 10. Most goals scored in a match (5), 11. 42 years old, 12. Pele, 13. 10-1, 14. Mexico 86, Costa Rica 90, United States 94, Nigeria 98 and China 2002, 15. Germany's Franz Beckenbauer (Captain in 1974, coach in 1990), 16. Ronaldo, 17. They all failed to score a goal at a World Cup,

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Australia v Scotland, World Cup Play-Off 1985

THE ROAD TO MEXICO '86

A personal story of when the Socceroos won over the bravehearts

Nineteen eighty-five was an interesting year for Australian football and for the Hay family. It was one of those so near yet so far occasions when the Socceroos got to the doorstep of the World Cup in Mexico, but were denied at the last moment, this time by my country of birth, Scotland. But I need to begin with the family side of the story.

My son, Ross, had been selected for the Victorian Country Region Under-13 team which had taken part in the State Championships that year. After it was over the Scottish-born coach announced that would take the squad to Europe to train and play for a month. We, the parents, all laughed. 'You don't take kids to Europe at that age,' we said. But he convinced us that it was feasible, that he could arrange sponsorship and he had contacts in Germany, Holland and the United Kingdom. So reluctantly we agreed and began fund raising.

Unfortunately, after a couple of months the coach became ill and had to withdraw leaving us in limbo and with no sponsorship. The parents agreed to continue, appointed a new coach and manager and we raised more than $66,000 to send the youngsters to the Hennef Sports Centre in Bonn, where they were coached by Bodo Ilgner, later to become the goalkeeper of the German national team. They also had games in Holland, Wales, Scotland and England. The squad included Kris Trajanovski who later played with distinction for Australia in the World Youth Cup in Portugal in 1991 and for the Socceroos.

The Socceroos in 1985. Back row, left to right: Zarko Odjakov, Oscar Crino, David Ratcliffe, Terry Greedy, Steve O'Connor, John Kosmina. Front row: Kenny Murphy, Marshall Soper, Joe Watson, Graeme Jennings, Charlie Yankos.

Robbie Dunn clears with a flying header over Frank McAvennie at Olympic Park in 1985 watched by left to right: Graham Jennings, Paul McStay, Graeme Sounness, Willie Miller and Zarko Odjakov.

The team was playing in the United Kingdom when my father-in-law died after a long battle with cancer, so my wife and I returned to Scotland for his funeral. While we were there the news came through that Australia had won the group qualifiers against Israel, Taiwan and New Zealand for the World Cup and was drawn to meet Scotland in a play-off to decide the final place in Mexico. Consulting our tickets I found that we were all due to return home before the first leg game at Hampden Park on 20 November 1985. That would not do, so I had the flights changed so that we could leave together the day after the game.

On a cool evening my son and I, accompanied by many of our family, descended into the bowl around Hampden Park in Glasgow along with 60,000 raucous Scots. As we reached the main grandstand I noticed Kenny Murphy and Joe Watson, two of the Scots-born Australians, had come out to soak up the atmosphere. So I took Ross, in his Victorian tracksuit, to meet them and assure them that they had one supporter at least from Australia. My own feelings were much more ambivalent in those days.

The Socceroos were a fine side in 1985. Terry Greedy in goals was safe and reliable. In front of him Charlie Yankos, David Ratcliffe and Steve 'Rocky' O'Connor formed an imposing physical barrier, with the skill of Alan Davidson on the right and Graham 'Flash' Jennings rampaging on the left. The midfield matched the steel of Murphy with the trickery of Watson and the finesse of the sublime Oscar Crino. Up front David Mitchell and John Kosmina had scored consistently in the qualifiers and would ensure the Scots defenders knew that they were in a game. Jim Patikas, Robbie Dunn, Frank Farina and Zarko Odjakov were quality substitutes. Frank Arok loved to project a mad dog image for his team, but he was the shrewdest of thinkers and he wanted his players to show their talent as well as their physicality.

It has to be said that the Scots had much the better of the first leg in Glasgow, though it took a David Cooper free kick and a sharp strike from debutant Frank McAvennie to give them a two-goal buffer for the second leg. Arok was incensed that the match was to be played on the Olympic Park 'bowling green' surface in Melbourne in the cool of a December evening. Johnny Warren wanted a bumpy pitch in Darwin at noon to unnerve the Scots! For the second leg, Dunn replaced the suspended O'Connor, and Jim Patikas, who had destroyed a Scottish Youth team at the World Cup in 1983, came in for Watson. Australia dominated the match, but a critical save by Jim Leighton from a Kosmina header and a couple of narrow misses by Odjakov and Farina when they came on as substitutes ensured that it was Scotland, managed by Alex Ferguson, not the Socceroos who went to Mexico in 1986. After seeing that game, my allegiances, like those of many present, were to Australia.

All pictures from Les Shorrock Collection, Deakin University Library Special Collections.

Oscar Crino runs away from Roy Aitken and Frank McAvennie at Olympic Park in 1985.

Words by Roy Hay

Photos by Les Shorrock

TARTAN TALK with Nic Townsend

Highlanders Euro Adventure Ends

Aberdeen's remarkable run in Europe finally came to an end this week after losing to Bayern Munich 5-1 at the Allianz Arena. When Aberdeen finished third last season, many would have seen qualification for Europe as an achievement in itself.

Fans' might have fantasised about a return to the early 1980s when Sir Alex Ferguson took them to the European Cup Winner's Cup and Super Cup, but in truth the Dons were never expected to progress very far. From their first match against Ukrainian side Dnipro, they looked out of their depth, but with dogged persistence (and a lot of luck: Dnipro hit the post three times) a 1-1 away draw was enough to see them through to the group stages.

Here they once again struggled losing to Panathinaikos and Athletico Madrid. However a stunning 4-0 win over FC Copenhagen (their only win in Europe this season) combined with the right results in other matches meant Aberdeen snack through to the knockout phase and a showdown with competition favourites Bayern Munich.

Aberdeen were unlucky to draw 2-2 at Pittodrie last week after Munich were rewarded a very soft penalty, but last Thursday night they were clearly outclassed leaving little doubt that Bayern were the superior side.

More Scots Set to Travel to Europe.

Aberdeen's gritty persistence in the UEFA Cup has helped make this season one of the most successful for Scottish clubs in European competitions for 25 years.

Along with Celtic and Rangers, three clubs have managed to extend their European season past Christmas. For the second successive year Celtic made it through to the final 16 of Champions League. Aiden McGeady, who has been the standout player in the SPL, managed to reproduce his form on the bigger stage last Wednesday night setting up both of Celtic's goals against Barcelona.

Unfortunately the Bhoys lost 3-2 and now must win by two goals at Camp Nou if they are to reach the quarterfinals.

Unlike Celtic Rangers failed to pass the group stages of Champions League but admittedly did find themselves in a much harder group. Last Thursday they progressed to the last 16 of the UEFA Cup after a 1-1 draw with Panathinaikos. Their next match will be against Werder Bremen.

By next week Rangers are likely to find themselves the only Scottish club still in Europe, however it has already proven to be a very successful season for Scottish clubs on the continent. This season Scotland has managed to rake up more points than larger football nations such as France, Holland and Portugal. Such performances are nearly certain to be rewarded with more Europeans places for Scottish clubs next season.

The Scottish Galactico

Hibernian are used to nurturing young talented footballers only to see them snatched away by bigger clubs as soon as they show signs of developing, yet fans were probably still shocked to hear that one of their own had attracted the attention of Real Madrid.

It appears Los Merengues have been watching young striker Steven Fletcher with a view of buying him when the transfer window reopens. Tired to shelling out bucket loads of Euros for Galacticos, Real Madrid are now embarking on a policy of signing promising young stars at bargain prices.

If reports are to be believed Real rate Fletcher amongst the top 10 prospects in Europe and they'll soon be offering £4 million to prise him from Easter Road to the Bernabeu.

English Premier League - Round 39

Only a few weeks after it's announcement it appears that the Premier League's plans for an international round of matches has been shot down in flames.

With the exception of maybe the Hong Kong Arsenal Supporters Club, EPL Chief Executive Richard Scudamore is the only one left still touting it as a sound idea. Both FIFA and the English FA are opposed. So to are the football associations of Japan and Australia, two countries likely to host such matches. Presumably Frank Lowy doesn't fancy the A-league's chances if pitted against a Manchester derby at the Telstra Stadium.

Even Premier League clubs, who could potentially reap huge profits from such matches, have only been half-hearted at best in their support. However of all the criticism the proposal has attracted, the best has come from UEFA president Michel Platini: 'It's a nonsense idea... Soon you will have in England no English presidents (of clubs), you already have no English (national team) coach, you have no English players and maybe now you will have no clubs playing in England. It's a joke.' And there it is, in plain English, the absolute absurdity of the proposal exposed.

Newcastle: The More Things Change…

Newcastle just looked destined to remain an underperforming club.

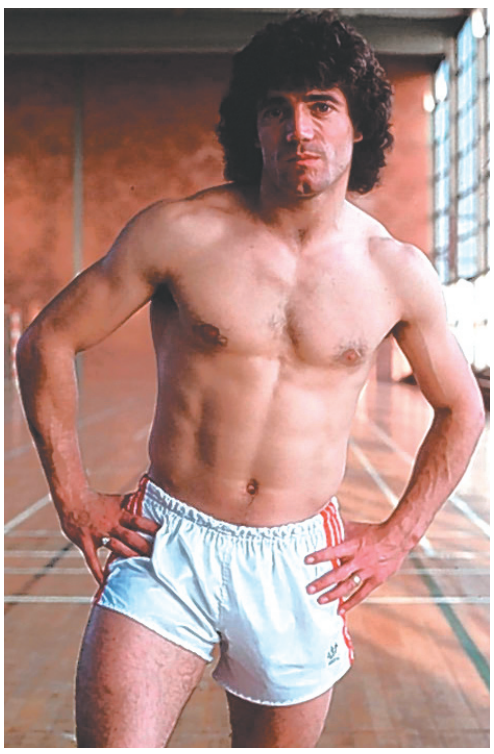
Every 6-12 months a much heralded signing or appointment at St.James Park gives everyone at the Toon reason to be optimistic about a return to the top four. And nearly always within a month their back to their solemn depressed selves as they linger in the lower half of the table.

At the start of the season it was the appointment of Sam Allardyce and the signing of Mark Viduka and Alan Smith. Not long into the new season and Newcastle found themselves losing to Derby, so far the only team to do so. The season before that it was signing Michael Owen.

Again, within weeks it was clear he'd be bothering the club's medical staff more than opposition defences.

The most recent headline-grabbing event has been the reappointment of Kevin Keegan as manager. A little over a month has passed since King Kev's return and already it is clear that he isn't going to magically transform Newcastle into Champions League material anymore than Michael Owen did. Newcastle are yet to win a game under Keegan, and can only boast two goals.

At the time of writing the Magpies were about to face Manchester United and unless Keegan can mastermind one of the upsets of the season, the winless streak looks set to continue.



Not for the first time, King Kevin Keegan aka Mighty Mouse, was unveiled as the new manager of the Geordies in the hope of rekindling the flagging fortunes of the Tynside club.

So frustrating has life as a Newcastle fan become that even Mike Ashley, the millionaire owner whose love of the club leads him to sit with away fans in a replica shirt rather than in the corporate boxes, is rumoured to be looking to sell less than a year after buying.

Leeds United

On the topic of big clubs fallen on hard times, Leeds United's quest to restore themselves to the top division has also badly stuttered.

Having started the new season in League 1 with a 15-point reduction, winning promotion was always going to be difficult. However under the guidance of Dennis Wise, Leeds quickly made up for the shortfall and by Christmas were in a play-off position.

Things fell apart last January when Wise left the club to join the Keegan revolution at Newcastle. Ever since Leeds have suffered a similar fate to the Magpies and have yet to notch up a single win in the last six games. They now find themselves 9th and unless their form can be regained soon, they'll be looking at the indignity of another season in the third tier.

Gossip and Transfer Speculation from the English Media...

Rafa Benitez admitted that he is still prepared to rest Fernando Torres despite seeing the Spanish striker rescue Liverpool with a hat-trick in Saturday's 3-2 win against Middlesbrough.
Torres, a 26.5million pounds signing from Atletico Madrid, took his tally for this campaign to 21 goals as Liverpool moved back into fourth place in the Premier League.

Arsenal manager Arsene Wenger could not contain his anger at Birmingham's Martin Taylor after the defender's horror tackle left Eduardo fighting to save his career.

Eduardo underwent surgery in Birmingham's Selly Oak hospital on Saturday night for a double compound fracture of his left leg after Taylor's lunge cast a black cloud over the Premier League match which finished 2-2.

Premier League high flyers Everton want South African midfielder Steven Pienaar to stay at Goodison Park.

Pienaar has impressed Everton boss David Moyes since his arrival on a season-long loan deal from German side Borussia Dortmund, playing an important role as the Merseysiders chase the UEFA Cup title as well as a place in the Champions League next season.

AC Milan vice-president Adriano Galliani insisted Saturday that coach Carlo Ancelotti was guaranteed his job with the European champions next season despite reports linking Marcello Lippi with the post.

"Milan, and I say it also in the name of president (Silvio) Berlusconi, will definitely have Carlo Ancelotti sitting on the bench in the 2008/09 season whether they reach the Champions League or not".

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